



FEATHERS AND FAIRIES ;
OR,
STORIES
FROM THE REALMS OF FANCY.

BY
THE HON. AUGUSTA BETHELL,
AUTHOR OF 'MILLICENT AND HER COUSINS,' 'ECHOES FROM AN OLD BELL,'
'HELEN IN SWITZERLAND,' ETC.

With Illustrations.



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TO SYBIL,

WITH HER AUNT'S LOVE.

It may perhaps be as well to state that the following Bird Legends are gleaned from Spanish, Norwegian, Danish, and Eastern sources. The settings alone are original.

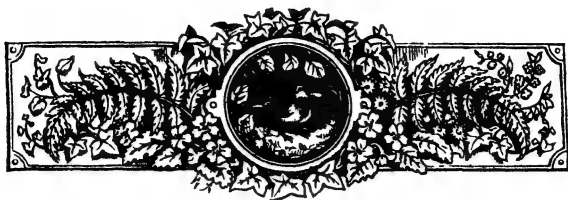
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LEGENDS
FROM
• THE FEATHERED WORLD.



*WHY THE CUCKOO DOES NOT BUILD
A NEST OF HER OWN.*

IT is spring - time in Denmark ; the green leaves are trembling against the blue sky, the air is soft and tender, the birds are singing joyously as they build their warm nests, while clear above other sounds in the green woods may be heard the oft-repeated note of the Cuckoo.

The Thrush, the Hedge-sparrow, and one or two other birds, shudder as they hear the cry. ‘Thief, cruel, unnatural, lazy bird!’ they exclaim ; ‘you steal into our nests, and there lay your eggs, to save yourself trouble and bring misery

upon us. We hatch them unconsciously, only to be treated with the basest ingratitude afterwards; for how often it happens that the miserable interlopers destroy our own children, by thrusting them out of the nest to make room for themselves!’

‘Nonsense, nonsense, nonsense!’ chattered a Magpie, who, flying near, had overheard the birds’ lament. ‘I know the real reason why the Cuckoo has no nest of its own. A lazy bird, indeed! No, that it is not. Come with me, and you shall see and hear for yourselves. Ha! ha! ha! there’s nothing like finding out everything. Never mind those miserable nests for a few moments, they will keep. Come with me.’ Curiosity prevailed over industry, and the birds, soaring into the air, followed their noisy guide, who, flying some little distance to the entrance of a beautiful wood, perched on the top of a high tree, and bade them do the same.

‘Be silent for a little while, now,’ said the Magpie, as if it were they and not she who

needed the caution; 'you will soon see and hear.'

The next moment the Cuckoo began afresh its monotonous note, and soon the sound of merry voices was heard breaking into the quiet of the wood. 'Look, look!' chattered the Magpie; and, following the direction of her glance, the birds saw troops of happy village girls, gaily dressed, pouring down into the valley from the hills above.

On entering the wood their chatter and laughter ceased, for matters of importance were about to take place; and, standing in a row, each girl first kissed her hand, and then asked in a musical voice, that trembled with the weight of the question: 'Cuckoo, cuckoo, when shall I be married?'

In answer, the bird repeated 'Cuckoo' as many times as years would pass before the wishes of each maiden would be fulfilled, making one happy, another angry, by the shortness or length of her monotonous song.

But the Cuckoo's labours were not ended when the gay, thoughtless girls had dispersed. For another group, this time of men and women, bent with age or trouble, now slowly wended their steps into the valley, and the question asked by each of them was :

‘When shall I be set free from the cares and sorrows of this world ?’

And although to some the answer might be short, to others it was long. For, notwithstanding years, trouble, and sickness, people contrive to live to a great age, so that in this case also the labours of the Cuckoo were not slight.

‘Now, now, now, do you understand ?’ chattered the Magpie ; ‘how can the poor Cuckoo find time to make a nest of her own, when she has to answer all these questions every day, and all day long ? The season for building goes by, and she is forced to take advantage of another bird’s nest.’

‘All very fine,’ answered the other birds,

flying off to their neglected nests in a great hurry; 'she does not trouble *your* nest, and so you can afford to make excuses for her.'

'I only hope,' added the Hedge-sparrow charitably, 'that all the young people this year will be married, and that all the old and unhappy people will die; then there may perhaps be a chance for our homes to escape invasion.'





*THE HOOPOE'S CREST OF FEATHERS, AND
THE VULTURE'S BARE NECK.*

ONE day, so long ago that to fix the true date would be impossible, a Magpie was seen flying in a restless, one might almost say inquisitive manner, north, south, east, and west.

The poor bird was thoroughly unhappy; all the zest had gone from her life, and for this reason: the time had come when no amount of prying could discover anything fresh or exciting in the affairs of her feathered neighbours. The secrets of their nests were laid bare to her; in vain had she peered and pryed into every hole and corner, beat about the bushes,

and ransacked all round for something to find out.

Her field of amusement was barren, at all events for a time, until new complications had arisen in the homes of her neighbours. Meanwhile, how was she to exist, deprived of her daily food? That was the question; and in an unhappy, querulous mood, the poor Magpie was flying to and fro, chattering to herself. Suddenly she perched on a branch of a tree, and looking down saw a Hoopoe running to and fro on a marshy piece of ground, collecting food for its young family, every now and then giving vent to a soft and happy 'hoop' on finding a particularly choice worm or insect.

'A poor-spirited creature, to find its pleasure in such a homely manner,' thought the Magpie, as, tired with her quick flight, she was watching with languid interest the Hoopoe's movements. 'Not such an ugly bird either, with that plumage.' Just at that moment the rays of the sun lighted up the Hoopoe's golden

crest, causing a sudden idea to dart into the Magpie's head, which revived her drooping spirits: 'Why should that bird of all others wear a crown of feathers—why, why, why?' And the next moment she was flying round and round the Hoopoe, startling the gentle quiet bird by repeating rapidly, 'Why, why, why, how did you come by your crown? Tell me, tell me,—quick, quick,—why, why, why?'

'I don't know,' stammered out the poor bewildered Hoopoe, whose wits are by no means equal to its plumage. 'I really can't tell you; I never heard. My father wore it before me, and I think my grandfather too; but I will ask my old grandmother when I go home, if you like, and will let you know next time you are passing this way.'

'Your old grandmother indeed!' laughed the Magpie contemptuously. 'If *your* wits come from her, she won't be able to enlighten me! I will find out for myself, thank you.'

With the thought of something to discover came fresh life and spirits; and, springing into the air, she flew off swift as an arrow, chattering gleefully, 'Something to find out, something to find out. He, he, he! Ho, ho, ho!'

For a moment or two the Hoopoe gazed after the noisy bird in quiet amazement; then, shaking its head as if perplexed, returned to the occupation in which it had been disturbed. A few days later, while again engaged in searching for food in the same spot, the Hoopoe heard a great noise overhead, and, looking up, there was the Magpie flying towards him, screaming out, 'I know all about it. He, he, he! Ho, ho, ho! I've found it out! And I know, too, why the Vulture has that ugly bare neck! He is coming after me to hear all about it; but he will hardly be pleased, I can tell him. He, he, he! Ho, ho, ho!'

The noisy bird perched breathless on the branch of a tree, and the Hoopoe politely offered her with his long bill a worm by way of refreshment.

‘No, thank you,’ said the Magpie; ‘excitement is all the food I require at present. Dear me, when *is* that stupid Vulture coming? Ah, now I see him hovering into sight!’ And as soon as the new-comer was in hearing, she chattered on: ‘Now, then, listen with all your ears; for it is a wonderful story, and I have been a long way to discover it.’

The Hoopoe promised his best attention, but the Vulture only vouchsafed a sulky grunt, as it settled itself on a tree in its usual moping, slouching manner, its head buried within its shoulder-bones.

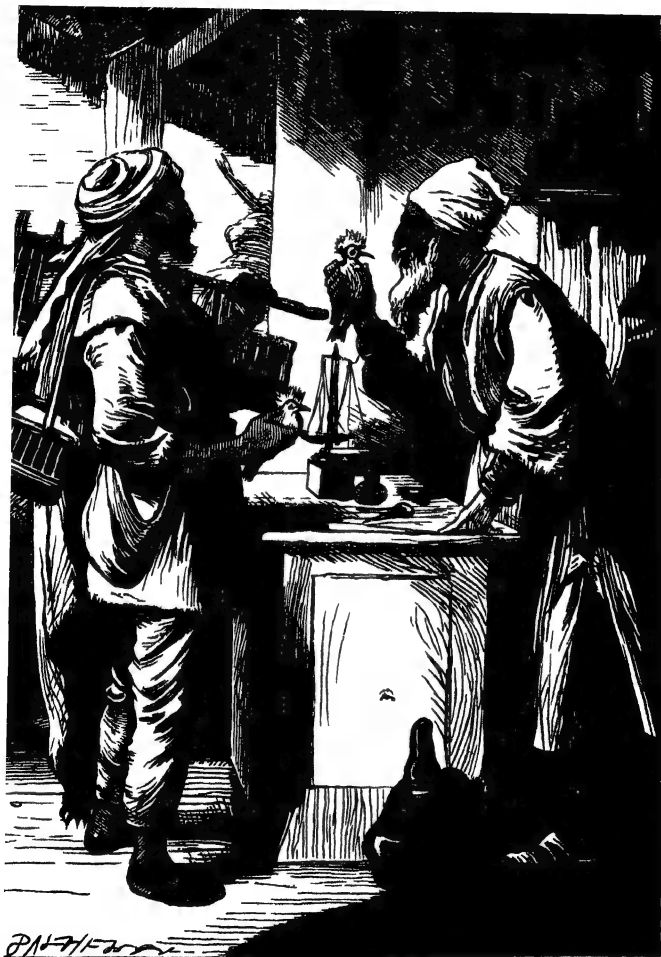
The Magpie began: ‘Hoopoes and Vultures are, it may be, less well-informed than Magpies; still it is possible that you may have heard of King Solomon, who in his wisdom could both understand and speak the language of every kind of animal. When this great King wished to travel, four genii carried him through the air on his throne of ivory. Now it chanced that on one occasion the rays of the sun poured

down upon his head, and he had nothing to protect him from the heat. His neck and shoulders were beginning to be scorched by the fiery beams, when he saw a flock of Vultures flying past. Then the King cried out, "Oh, Vultures! come and fly between me and the sun, and make a shadow with your wings; for my neck and face are hurt by its burning rays." But the Vultures answered, "To do this, O King, we must turn back in our flight; for we are flying towards the north, and your face is turned towards the south. We desire to continue on our way, therefore we cannot fly above your throne to protect you from the sun, although its rays may be scorching your neck and face." Then King Solomon grew angry, and he called out, "Oh, foolish and short-sighted Vultures, this, then, shall be your punishment! Because you will not obey the command of your lord, the feathers shall fall off from your necks, and they shall be exposed to the heat of the sun and the cold of the winter. And

whereas ye have hitherto fared delicately, henceforth ye shall eat carrion, and your race shall be impure till the end of the world." And it was done unto the Vultures as King Solomon had said. And now a large flock of Hoopoes came flying past, and the King cried out to them, "Oh, Hoopoes! come and fly between me and the sun, that I may be shielded from its rays by the shadow of your wings." The king of the Hoopoes immediately answered, "O King, we are but little fowls, and we are not able to afford much shade, but by our numbers we will make up for our small size." So the Hoopoes gathered together, and formed a kind of cloud over the King's throne, thereby sheltering him from the rays of the sun. When the journey was over, and King Solomon was once more inside his beautiful palace of ivory, inlaid with precious stones, he commanded the king of the Hoopoes to be brought before him; and he asked the bird what reward should be bestowed upon him and upon his race for the service that

had been rendered, and the obedience that had been shown to their king and master. Now, the king of the Hoopoes was confused with the great honour of standing before the feet of the mighty King; and all he could do was to lay his right claw upon his heart, and say, "O King, live for ever! Let a day be given to thy servant, to consider with his queen and councillors what shall be done unto us." "Be it so," said King Solomon. But the Hoopoe, when consulting with his queen and councillors, found it a difficult matter to decide; for one wished for a long tail, another for blue and green feathers, while a third would have liked to have become the size of an Ostrich. The sun went down, but nothing had been settled; at length the queen took the king of the Hoopoes apart, and said to him, "My dear lord and husband, listen to my words. We have preserved the head of King Solomon; let us therefore ask for crowns of gold on our heads, that we may be superior to all other birds." As the princesses also

thought this would be a charming request, the king agreed to lay it before King Solomon, who, having heard it, said, "Hast thou considered well what it is that thou wishest?" "Yes, O King," answered the Hoopoe. "We desire to have golden crowns upon our heads." To which Solomon replied, "Crowns of gold shall ye have; but, behold, ye are foolish birds; and when the evil day shall come upon ye, and ye see the folly of your hearts, return here to me, and I will give you help." And now all the Hoopoes had golden crowns, and were exceedingly proud and haughty, frequenting the margins of the lakes and pools, in order that they might admire themselves therein; and the queen sat upon a twig, and gave herself airs, refusing to speak to the other birds who had been her friends, because they were but vulgar birds, and she wore a crown on her head. But woe was at hand for the Hoopoes! There was a certain fowler who set traps for birds, attracting them with a piece of a broken mirror; and a vain Hoopoe,



The Fowler bringing the head of the hoopoe — page 19.

who went in to admire itself, was caught. The fowler wrung off the head with its shining crown, and took it to a Jew to discover its value. The Jew said it was a crown of brass, and gave the fowler money for it, telling him to bring him as many as he could procure, and say nothing about the matter. The fowler obeyed, and a great many more Hoopoes were caught; but one day a jeweller met the man, and seeing the crowns, pronounced them to be pure gold, offering a large sum for them. And now that the true value of the crowns was known, the days of the Hoopoes were numbered; for all the sons of Israel were on the alert to slay them or take them captive, and before long few were left to bewail their cruel destiny. But the king had escaped, and at length he flew by stealth to the Court of King Solomon, and, standing once more before the golden throne, with tears and groans, related the misfortunes which had happened to his race. King Solomon looked kindly upon the poor bird, and said, "Did I

not warn thee of the folly of wishing to have crowns of gold? Vanity and pride have been your ruin; but now your crowns of gold shall be changed into crowns of feathers, and ye shall walk unharmed upon the earth." Then the Hoopoes were no longer persecuted; and from that time forth they have flourished and increased, and continued in peace up to the present day.'

The Vulture had taken his departure long before the story was ended. Apparently the part his race played in it was displeasing to his feelings; for he cast a spiteful glance at the Magpie as he soared into the air, which made the storyteller shiver, so plainly did it say, 'I should like to have the picking of your bones for this!' But the gentle Hoopoe thanked the Magpie for so pretty a piece of family tradition, and only hoped he should not forget the best parts when repeating it to his wife and children in the evening.



THE BULLFINCH AND ITS RED BREAST.

ADAPTED FROM THE NORWEGIAN.

HELP! Fire! Help! Fire in the Camp of the Roses!' This terrifying cry arose in the Garden of Eden one evening shortly after the expulsion of Adam and Eve. The scene of their disobedience had been given up to wild Nature, whose frolicsome children were unceasing with their pranks and jokes. The alarm came from the night birds, always the most mischievous. It was night, under the dark cedars and chestnuts, but the hill which was called the Camp of the Roses seemed to stand in flames. The

birds of the night, having slept the whole day, were beginning to feel lively, now that the sun was setting, and found it dull work playing tricks without spectators. So now thousands of them were flying to and fro, screaming in hoarse tones, 'Help! fire! help! Fire in the Camp of the Roses. See, see, the ranunculuses have kindled it!' Since Adam and Eve had been expelled from Paradise, weeds and trailing plants had converted it into a wilderness. Creepers, nettles, and other invaders had in thick masses encircled the beautiful bed of flowers planted by Eve. The yellow henbane audaciously wafted its stupefying breath among the pure white lilies; impertinent Storks stuck their long bills into the honey cups of the violets, and drained their sweet contents; the bindweeds cast out their foot-traps among the waxen hyacinths; but above all, it was the poisonous burning ranunculuses who wished to govern. They had taken the magnificent name of 'Eyes of the Sun;' their slender branch-

ing stalks were spread over all, and it was they who were accused of setting on fire the home of the delicate pink and white roses.

Thousands of night birds flew up and down between the trees where the day birds slept, calling out the foolish but terrifying report; and truly, to those birds who first opened their sleepy eyes, it seemed as if the Rosehill stood in flames. The most alarmed of all was a pair of Bullfinches, who, perched on one leg, with their heads comfortably nestled under their wings, were having their first nap on a chestnut tree. They were not so clever as the Linnet, the Siskin, and many others with quicker wits, who, perceiving at once that it was only a false alarm of fire, settled themselves down again to sleep. No; they were truly the most simple among the birds, and had come from the Creator's hand as grey as the Sparrows, or as the loam from which they were kneaded.

‘Do you hear, dear Pipelipipah?’ cried her husband, rubbing his eyes; ‘and do you

see how the Rosehill blazes? Oh! Oh! we must help to put the fire out.'

'Not if I know it,' said the other. 'What! scorch our feathers? Oh, no!'

'Yes, for in one of these same rose-bushes we were reared, Pipel. They are our fatherland, and even were we to lose our lives'—

And whirr—away flew the courageous grateful little Bullfinch, brave as a soldier who rushes to destruction.

A merry trill of laughter came from the other birds, and some of them called after him, 'Greyfinch, Greyfinch, don't burn yourself!'

The little hero vanished among the roses. When he again came to sight, a tear of vexation sparkled in his eye, and a drop of red blood was on his grey breast, which had been wounded by a thorn. He felt as if he must die of shame and sorrow. Then he heard a rustling of wings near him, and an angel's soft voice comforted him with these words: 'Thou good, grateful little creature, who would have

sacrificed thyself for the bushes thou callest thy fatherland, the will shall be taken for the deed, and this shall be thy reward: This drop of thy faithful blood shall cover thy courageous little breast, and henceforth thou shalt become one of the fairest in the wood, like unto a rose on the branch of the tree.' And so saying, the angel spread the drop of blood over the bird's breast, and the hue was like unto that of the most beautiful rose. 'Thou hast wept,' added the angel, when he saw the tear glistening in his eye. 'Well, keep also this new beauty.' And from that time the Bullfinch has had the most beautiful eyes among birds.

'But Pipelipipah?' said the Bullfinch.

'Good little bird, to think of her,' said the angel. 'Now, choose whichever colour thou wilt from the flowers in this bed.'

This was almost too much for the modest bird; but at length he chose from the aconite some blue for his wings, and from the lilies a pair of the broad white bands for his body.

‘ But Pipelipipah ? ’

‘ She shall have no scarlet decoration,’ answered the angel, half angrily. ‘ She shall remain grey as before.’

Pipelipipah was very much astonished, and perhaps not a little envious, when her mate returned adorned so magnificently ; but it was too late for repentance to be of any use, and she has remained grey to this day.





THE MAGPIE, WREN, LAPWING, AND
WOODPECKER.

LOOK at my cones, how well shaped they are, and see how many I have for my size !' cried a straight, healthy young Pine tree who lived in Spain, to one of his neighbours. 'I hope I shall not lose them for a long time, they add so much to my appearance.'

'Ah! but you *will* lose them, and very quickly too,' was the answer. 'Our enemies the Magpies will soon be here, and then it is war indeed to us and our cones.'

'Why, what will they do to us ?' asked the young Pine, alarmed.

‘ Shall I tell you of your first ancestor, who outwitted the proud eagle in the contest for the crown?’

‘ Yes, yes,’ chirped the Wren; ‘ I have never heard the tale.’

‘ It happened thus,’ said the Pine. ‘ One day the birds of the air met together, and decided that it was necessary to choose a king. Then followed a long argument as to how he was to be chosen. At length the Owl suggested, that whichever bird could fly highest, that bird would be the fittest to be the sovereign of them all. The Eagle laughed in his wing on hearing this, for he felt sure of flying far above all the others. Just as they were starting, however, what did the little sly Wren do, but hop up and hide himself in the Eagle’s tail. Away went the birds, up, up, up, ever higher and higher; but the Eagle soared a long way above all the rest, till, feeling too tired to fly another stroke, he called out: “ Hurrah! hurrah! I am the king of the birds!” “ Not

so," cried the little Wren, springing from his tail and flying above him; "it is I who am king."

"You!" screamed the Eagle, enraged at the trick, and with his powerful wing he gave the poor little bird a stroke which half killed him; and the result has been, that from that day to this, no one of its descendants has been able to fly higher than a hawthorn bush.'

'What a cruel revenge!' chirped the little Wren indignantly.

'You have said nothing of the share my first ancestor took in the matter,' said in sleepy tones a fluffy Owl, who happened to be sufficiently awake to hear the story. 'My old grandmother used to tell me that the tricky Wren was shut up in a mouse-hole, and the Owl set to watch so that it should not escape. But my ancestress fell asleep, and the prisoner managed to squeeze its small body out of the mouse hole. Whereupon the other birds were so angry with the poor Owl, that

they forbade her and her descendants ever to show themselves by daylight again. I think we do disobey sometimes, however, but always with ill effects.'

'Dear me,' said the Pine, 'that is a very interesting piece of family tradition, which I have never heard before. Is that all you have to tell, Mrs. Owl?' But the only reply was a muffled snore, for the Owl had again fallen fast asleep.

Now was heard the peculiar wailing cry of the Lapwing; and as it flew in a curious tumbling way round the old Pine, it wailed out, 'What have you to tell of me, of me, of me?'

'Nothing that you would care to hear, I am afraid,' replied the Tree; 'better not ask, friend Lapwing.'

But the bird would not take the friendly hint; and so, much to his dislike, the old Pine was forced to relate the following legend:

'A great many years ago there lived a dis-

honest handmaiden who went from place to place stealing and pilfering. For some time she was not found out; but one day she stole a pair of silver scissors from her mistress, and was on her way to sell them at the silver-smith's, when a holy man met her and charged her with the theft. She denied it, but at that moment the scissors fell from her guilty, trembling hands.

“For this crime shalt thou be changed into a bird,” said the holy man, “and thou and thy race shall for ever bear a forked tail as a brand of thy theft. Thy flight shall be restless, and thy cry plaintive.” And thus was the dishonest handmaiden transformed into the first Lapwing.’

A dead silence followed this story, only broken by the wailing cry of the bird as it flew off, forgetting, or perhaps not wishing, to thank the old Pine.

But the little Wren's hunger for stories was still unappeased. ‘Tell us one more, just one more,

old Pine,' he implored; and the Tree complied with the request, telling him the following legend of the black Woodpecker:

'This bird was once a baker's wife, but for her avarice she was transformed into a Woodpecker. It happened thus: One day two saints came to her house, and, tired and faint with walking, begged for a piece of bread to stay their hunger. The old woman was not fond of beggars or of giving, still she said she would give them a small piece. So she took a little bit of dough and rolled it out; but as she rolled, it became larger and larger, and she could not find it in her heart to give it away. So she put it on one side, and took a smaller piece of dough; but when rolled out, that became as large as the last, so it was impossible the beggars could have that piece. The third time, she took such a tiny bit of dough that it could scarcely be seen, but the same thing happened: it was too large when rolled out to give away, and she told the saints they

must go without any bread, for she had no piece small enough to give them. Then they were very angry because of her avarice and hard-heartedness, and for a punishment they transformed her into a bird which should seek its food between bark and bole, and never get a drop to drink except when it rained. And up the chimney flew the baker's wife as a Woodpecker, the soot making her body black. And to this day she hacks and taps away at the trees for her food; and when rain is coming, she whistles for joy, for she is always thirsty, and longing for the cool drops to fall on her tongue.'

'Thank you,' said the Wren, hopping up and down the branch gratefully, 'I shall always be glad for the poor Woodpecker now when the rain falls. Dear me, what a sad fate! Well, good-bye, I mustn't fatigue you with my weight any longer.' The old Pine smiled, and the grey lichens that clothed his lower limbs crackled with suppressed laughter; for, to the

mighty giant of the forest, the weight of a thousand Wrens would have made but little difference. But the Tree only said :

‘ Good-bye, wee bird ; come again whenever you like, and I will try and remember some more stories to tell you.’

And away flew the Wren home to its own little nest, meditating deeply on all the wonders it had heard.



THE CRUETS.



THE CRUETS.

THREE pieces of family plate they had seemed to me, and that only, until my eyes learned to see something more in them.

I might tell you how they came into my family, but on consideration I will spare you those details, and I will only describe what they *are*, what they *do*, and how I found out all about them, or at least about two of them. A Pug Dog, an Owl, and a Swan. That is what they are.

Now for what they do. Well, they sit in the centre of my dining-table every day. Two large spoons are put crossways in front of each,

and a glass water-bottle stands as sentry behind each ; and Puggie holds red pepper, while the Swan and the Owl hold salt and white pepper.

Dear me ! you say, what a fuss all about nothing ! They are only a set of cruets, then, after all ! Well, wait a moment, until they begin to speak for themselves. Bless me ! there are endless poor folks in the world who are run down like that, only because they never get a chance of speaking up for themselves. But before they speak, I must tell you how I came to find out they could talk,—ah ! and very well, too. Now - a - days people want to know the whys and wherefores of everything—they take nothing on trust ; and I daresay you are like the rest of them, so you shall be told how I heard it all with my very own ears.

You see, I am getting old ; and when I go to bed, I am not like you young ones, who drop your heads on to your pillows and never lift them up again till you hear the water splashing

into your morning bath. On the contrary, I often lie awake for long hours in the dark; and lying awake is apt to make one restless and tired, and then faint, and often very hungry. So sometimes, when it comes to that, I get up, light my candle, and prow! about the house in search of something to eat.

Did you ever walk about the house when every one else in it was sound asleep? It is the funniest thing possible; for, instead of the house going to sleep when all the inmates do so, it becomes full of life, and is much wider awake than is ever the case in the day-time. The sofas, chairs, tables, and stools, the little china figures who stand so demurely all day on the chimney-piece, the other ornaments, and even the flowers you left in your vase on the table, all wake up and set to work, talking and laughing. The pianoforte keeps up a low musical murmur as an accompaniment to their chatter, while the clock puts another sort of expression into that stolid mimicking face of

his, and sometimes I fancy, in his enjoyment of society, forgets to tell them how the small hours run on.

If you ask me how I know all this, I must tell you that, although I am a very deaf old person in the day-time, yet at night, when alone, I hear all kind of mysterious things,—whisperings, rustlings, laughter, and murmurs. So, then, I know there is some sort of a world alive about me; and when I pop suddenly into the drawing-room, I am not a bit surprised to see the newspaper I had left on the ottoman gliding gently from my own particular arm-chair, who shakes out her chintz skirt as she hears me, and stares stupidly before her, as though she were only accustomed to be sat upon all her life long.

The piano gives a little slam, while one musical note echoes away with a sort of wail, and then I see several cane-bottomed chairs huddled together at one end of the room, giving me the idea of having interrupted a dance. The clock

stands stolid as ever, only I catch just a passing wink of amusement on his face, which says, 'Ah! if you had only come in before I chimed that last quarter!' Well, on the night in which I heard the following stories, everything in the house seemed particularly lively. The moon was shining brightly; and as she peered over the tops of the shutters at me, her silver light was so suitable to all the uncanny pranks I heard around me, that I put out my candle, and stole down-stairs in the dark to get what I wanted. As I crept along towards the pantry, there were certainly voices to be heard. 'Oh, dear!' thought I, 'no doubt Fanny has left all the plate down-stairs, and it is being stolen!' But no; those were no rough human voices I heard. There was a melancholy sound of 'Tu whit—tu whoo-oo'—a subdued growling reply, and at intervals two or three notes of such exquisite sweetness from another voice, that I forgot the cold, the darkness, and my hunger, as I crept forward to listen.

‘Tu whoo-o!’ sighed the melancholy one; ‘we are only electro-plate; that is why we are left down here. You should have seen how those saucy spoons looked at me when they went upstairs in the green basket. Tu whoo-oo-o!’

‘Wowf, wowf!’ said another voice, in a short, sensible manner. ‘I don’t want to be rude, but you ladies know nothing about the matter. You are left down here because you are in *my* charge, and I am left down here, of course, to take care of everything. Why, you don’t suppose that our mistress is so stupid as not to know that a dog who is always awake is worth two of such a creature as the one I hear snoring away now in the kitchen, although *he can* run about!’ This biting remark was levelled at my poor fat dog, whose snores, as he lay stretched before the remains of the kitchen fire, certainly said more for his comfort than for his vigilance as guardian of the house.

‘Who-o-o,’ said the dismal voice. ‘Surely a bird who is *always* awake at night, and whose

grandfathers and great-grandfathers have always been awake at night, is as good a person to leave in charge as a dog indeed! And so, perhaps, Mr. Pug, after all, if it comes to that, *I* am left down here to take care of you all—a bird of wisdom, too.'

But her self-satisfaction was cut short by my friend Pug, who, with his usual preliminary of 'Wowf, wowf,' settled the discussion by saying, 'I don't want to be rude, as I remarked before; no well-brought-up dog ever is, and I am sure I don't want to deny your grandfathers', or great-great-grandfathers', capabilities of keeping their eyes open, ma'am. I've no doubt they were a very wide-awake lot. You yourself, I notice, though you *have* lost an eye, always manage to get on the side of the table next the fire, out of the draughts. One hardly needs to be told *why* you are called a bird of wisdom!'

A momentary pause. I think the last speaker was rather ashamed of that little snarl at the end of his speech, for he began to clear

his throat in an apologetic manner. But before he had time for more, the Owl replied sharply, 'Who-o! Any one who has ever received any education at all, knows that all those of my race have been called birds of wisdom for centuries, because our ancestor sprang from a woman's head. Before that, I suppose wisdom was as little known in the world as good manners are now, it seems to me!' And a ruffling of plumes, together with a pungent smell, which set her hearers sneezing, assured me that the peppery little Owl was asserting at once her dignity and indignation.

A subdued murmur of sympathy from the Swan tended to console her. The Pug dog evidently felt himself in a minority.

'Well, well,' he said, 'don't let us quarrel; for it strikes me we can employ the time more amusingly. You two ladies must have had interesting lives. Suppose you relate your own histories. I have always heard that nothing is pleasanter to a lady than talking about herself.

You, madam, in virtue of your wisdom, as well as of your long pedigree (this to the Owl, who blinked her one eye condescendingly in acknowledgment of the agreeable though tardy recognition of her merits), must take precedence; and I am sure we shall derive both profit and pleasure from anything you may be so good as to tell us.'

With which handsome though rather pompous *amende honorable*, Puggie turned round three times in search of his tail, which remained tightly curled up over his back all the time, and finally composed himself to listen with an air of the deepest interest and attention.

Silence for a moment or two. I confess I was very anxious to hear the result of Puggie's proposal.

In a more than usually melancholy and sepulchral voice, the Owl remarked:

'Allusion has been made to a personal infirmity of mine.' Here she paused, while Pug fidgeted off to his right, thereby bringing him-

self to her blind side, whence he made a grimace at her in perfect safety. 'I forgive the remark,' she continued; 'but it might be interesting to the present company to learn why I have never been the possessor of more than one eye.'

'Indeed it would be,' said her auditors.

Whereupon she began as follows:—

THE OWL'S STORY.

"'Tis merrie, 'tis merrie in fayre green woode." That is what some poet says somewhere. I suppose he found the merriment to consist in the enjoyment of the beautiful sights and sounds around him, in the sweet air and sunshine: for though I do not enjoy sunshine myself, yet I like to feel it; and I can fancy that the golden glory and shimmer of green I have seen through my half-closed eyelids in the days of my infancy, must be very beautiful to those who can open their eyes wide and look at it. It seems to me, however, that those two-legged creatures called

men care but little for these things themselves ; for they only come into a lovely wood to spread death and terror around them out of those long firesticks of theirs.'

'Guns, guns, Mrs. Owl,' interrupted Puggie with a superior air ; 'and sport must be encouraged, you know.'

'Sport,' answered the Owl, ruffling herself ; 'yes, fine sport ; and a great deal, I should fancy, *you* know about it,—they don't take dogs of your size or kind on such expeditions. But you are right in one way, too : the sport of ~~the~~ world generally consists in the weak suffering for the pleasure of the strong ; and you need not be afraid of that sort of sport wanting encouragement. You must forgive my moralizing,' she said, seeing a slight inclination to yawn on the part of her listeners. 'My father was a great philosopher, and I caught the trick from him. I suppose it was the day-time in the woods that the poet praised so much. Ah ! if he had only seen it at our time of enjoying it,

in the middle of a calm summer's night, when the moon pours a soft silvery glory down the green paths, when every leaf on the trees, all the lovely ferns and mosses, even the flowers before they sleep, dress themselves in dewdrops that glitter in her beams like millions of diamonds. Then, indeed, life and merriment go on! The glowworms line the green glades and banks, hanging out their golden lamps to light the merrymakers to their revels. The hares sit up in the moonlight washing their faces; the little rabbits scutter in and out among the brushwood, playing at "Touch my tail," as they call their pet game,—I suppose because there are no tails to touch! The squirrels race up and down the branches, pelting the hares, rabbits, and each other with acorns and empty nutshells; while from some neighbouring tree suddenly flows out on the quiet night a flood of such exquisite melody, that the animals pause to listen in the midst even of their maddest pranks; and when it ceases, the trees and plants shake

themselves with a gentle rustle of gratitude to their cherished *prima donna*, the nightingale. How she sang, and, I doubt not, sings still! Many a time, when our mother was out hunting for our supper, has she come and sung to us little ones to keep us quiet, until such wonderful thoughts and feelings would come over me. I seemed to expand into something better than a poor fluffy little owl. Ah, well! You must forgive these recollections; they are all that remain to me of that happy childhood. For after this comes a long blank in my memory, and I remember nothing more, until one day I suddenly seemed to wake up to find myself in my present form, in a large workshop, in what must have been a very big town.

‘An oldish man, with a pale, thin, careworn face, had me in his hand. This I discovered by peering out of the only eye I found I possessed; for when I shut this eye, all was perfect darkness around me—a state of things that has never altered for me since. Yet I was

very nearly having two eyes; for in the man's fingers, when I first looked at him, I saw a small red object with a black dot in the centre, that, I am sure, was intended for my second organ of sight; but as he held me and it, a sudden faintness seemed to come over him. He laid us both down on the table and leaned his head beside us, and presently I heard a voice saying in kindly accents, but with a tone of authority :

“Now, Stevens, my man, this won't do at all. You're not fit to be at your work. Go home at once. You can take the jobs you have there with you, and finish them as you can; but don't let me see you here again till you've more backbone in you.”

‘Stevens lifted up his poor aching head.

“Ah, sir, but it's my girl; who's to do for her if I'm laid by?”

“Don't worry about that, man, for a bit. We know our good hands from the bad ones, and we will see to that till you are better. Go

home now, and get your girl to nurse you up a bit."

"You are very good, sir," was the reply, in a faint tone. And the tired man rose, collected his tools, wrapped me and several other small objects of the same description carefully in paper, put us in a basket, and started, with feeble steps, on his homeward journey.

'It seemed a long way to me, but at last some stairs were mounted, and a door pushed open; and I heard a clear, girlish voice exclaim, "Why, father! home so early? And how tired you look!"

"Yes, child," he panted out rather than spoke; "I'm very nigh done up, and the master sent me home, and my work too. Undo the bits of things, and put 'em up carefully on that shelf. I'll let 'em bide till to-morrow."

'They were not clumsy fingers that undid my paper wrappings so quickly and neatly, and set me up almost tenderly on the shelf, whence I could look round and see what sort of lives

these were into which I had been brought so suddenly. And it was a pleasant face that was turned up to me where I stood. Two clear, honest grey eyes, with a setting of brown eyelashes and eyebrows, rather a pale but healthy complexion, and an abundance of glossy brown hair, with such a pretty wave and curl in it, adorning a well-shaped small head.

‘Though the voice was sweet and cheerful, and the face brightened as it turned to her father, yet even with my one eye I could discern, as I looked into her two eyes, a sad and anxious look. And I had not been long in the room before I saw that every knock, every step she heard outside or on the stairs, would bring a flush of colour into her face, and a hopeful look into her eyes, only, however, to die away, and be succeeded by a sadder gaze than before.

‘Doubtless the state of her father’s health would account for some of her sad looks, for now I could see more clearly how terribly ill he looked, and how little chance there was of

his ever returning to the work he had just put by. But she had another grief besides this, and one which her father shared with her, as I soon learnt. Indeed, I never saw such touching love as between this father and child; it was but one short scene in their life that I witnessed, but the recollection of it often brings as many tears to my one eye as would serve for two. It was a poor room—a *very* poor place, but so clean, so delicately kept, you could see they were not coarse or common folk who owned it. In one corner stood the father's low bed with its scanty coverings, and in a small cupboard place that opened out from the room the daughter had her nest. She seemed to take a fancy to me, directly she took me out of the paper.

“Eh, father, what a pretty little bird, and how wise she looks! And oh, dear, to see its feathers! The master may well say there's no hand like yours for the best bits of work. One would think you had lived among the creatures all your life, you make 'em look so natural

like. But, dear," she continued, "the poor little bird has only got one eye, for all that she looks wiser than some with two."

' "No," said her father, "that's where I gave up to-day; but I've got her eye safe enough in my weskit pocket, and to-morrow she shall have two like the rest of 'em."

' Alas ! that to-morrow never came for me, and never will come now. "She can wait for her eye, father dear, till you're a bit stronger," the girl said, "and now I shall give you a cup of tea, for you look to need something."

' It was pretty to see her quick nice ways, how lovingly she tended the poor sick man, made him tea and toast, and hung over him while he ate it, almost like a mother over a child. Then, when he had finished, and all was cleared away, and he leant back in his chair before the fire, too tired and weak to do aught but sit and look into it, she took her own little stool, and creeping up close to him, laid her head on his shoulder, and twisted her fingers



Creeping close to him, she laid her head on his shoulder —Page 36.

into his, seeming glad of the dusk which allowed her sad looks to have their way, and, as I saw by the firelight, several glistening drops to find their way down her cheeks.

“Have you heard aught to-day, my lass?” asked her father, taking care not to look at her.

“No, father,” was the answer in very low tones, nestling her face still closer on to his shoulder.

“When does the ship sail?”

“In a month from yesterday. They gave him six weeks to get ready. ’Tis a fortnight come to-morrow since he was here,” she added sadly.

“John Hardman does not deserve thee, my child; but for all that, it’s a bitter thought to me that I’ve stood ’twixt thee and what thou thought’st thy happiness.”

“Father, father, never say that!” cried the girl, throwing her arms round him; “where would my happiness have been, to go and leave

you ill and sad, and not able to tend yourself? Haven't you been better to me than ten husbands?" she went on touchingly. "Who has cared for me and worked for me as you've done? I'll never leave you, and them as won't wait for me must do without me."

'Her father drew her closer to him, stroking her hair, and murmuring, "My own dear lass, my own dear lass!"

'After a time, she said in a low tone, "Father, you'll try and not think too hard of poor Jack. He was always a bit hot-tempered, you know; but he loved me true, I believe, and it riled him to find he couldn't be first while I had you."

'Ah! thought I, there's a true woman. Her lover deserts her, and yet she must find a good word to say for him. I wonder how it would be, though, if she heard he had found another young woman more to his liking! She would scarcely find excuses for him then, I should think.

'Just then came a knock at the door,—not a

loud noisy summons, but one dealt by a gentle yet firm hand.

“Come in,” said Stevens.

‘A woman entered, closing the door carefully behind her.

‘Mary rose from her father’s side and lighted a candle, for the dusk had almost deepened into darkness, and the only light was from the flickering flame of the small fire.

‘As she turned with the light in her hand to welcome the visitor, I could see how the colour rose in her face at sight of her.

“Oh, have you brought me any news?” she cried out, going up to her quickly.

‘The new-comer was a tall young woman, whether of good figure or not I couldn’t say, for one of those long cloaks of grey stuff fell in close limp folds down to her feet. A small straw bonnet, under which her hair was braided very neatly, sat closely to her head. The face was good enough, very pale, the features clearly cut, but there was a cold look in the eyes that

repelled you when she raised them. Her movements were perfectly calm and deliberate, as she advanced quietly and seated herself before answering Mary's eager question. I noticed, too, that she avoided the outstretched hands of both father and daughter; her own hands were wrapped inside her cloak, and she seemed unwilling to disentangle them.

“Well, Hannah, girl, I'm glad to see you. Have you brought any news for my Mary here?” And though Stevens affected to speak carelessly, I could see he looked as anxious to hear what his quiet visitor had to say as was his pretty daughter.

“I *have* brought Mary some tidings,” said a very calm and sad-toned voice; “they were tidings I wanted to bring myself. Father said I had better write them. *I* thought not.” Just a little pause here; then,—“I am going to marry John Hardman, and sail with him to Canada in a month.” All this was said in an even, monotonous tone; and though the cold

pale eyes were fixed on the father and girl as they sat before her, yet they seemed to be, as it were, looking through them miles away on some far-off thought.

‘A strong expression broke from Stevens as she finished her short speech, and he brought his fist down violently on to his knee. Mary gave a low cry, such as you might fancy a small wounded animal doing; then buried her head on her father’s shoulder.

‘Hannah sat motionless.

“‘And so this is the end of your taking in other girls’ sweethearts as lodgers, is it, Hannah?” broke out Stevens at last. “Well, I thought better of you, and of your father and mother too, and so you may tell ’em. And now you shall have a piece of my mind afore you go, as you may carry with you to your husband as is to be. You may tell him I said you were going to marry a good-for-nothing, heartless, bad fellow, a man as will pretend to love a good girl and then turn his back upon

her, 'cos she can't make up her mind straight on end to desert her poor old sick father. *He* knew well enough that he wouldn't have had to wait long for my being safe out of the way under ground; but I suppose he was tired of us and our poor ways, and knew, like most folks, where his bread would get most butter on it. And then to send you here to tell of his false doings—why wasn't he man enough to let us know by his own mouth?"

"No, no, father dear, don't say those things!" cried Mary, raising her head. "Jack isn't mean and bad like that! Oh no, Hannah," she continued, turning to her, with her voice broken by sobs, "never believe that of him; if he has asked you to marry him, it's because he likes you, not because your father has money. And oh, father! he *never* said you were going to leave me, he couldn't have,—it isn't true." And she threw her arms round him, as if she would hold him back for ever from the dark shadow one could see so plainly by

his side. "Oh, father," she sobbed, "don't make my trouble too heavy for me by saying those things."

'The tears were rolling down Stevens's face; he took her to his breast and comforted her, as well as he knew how, with loving words and kisses.

'Hannah rose to go.

"You judge me and those belonging to me harshly, Mr. Stevens," she said, "and I think you judge John Hardman unjustly too. He wants a wife to take out to this new life, and your daughter will not marry him. I never had a wish to take Mary's sweetheart from her, and would have bid her God-speed gladly if she had chosen to go with him. If I do so, it is not for the sake of the man, though I should always do my duty towards him, but because I have long felt that I have a particular work to do in the world, and by marrying him I shall be able to set about it." She passed on towards the door. But Mary left her father's

side, and stopped her as she was going. I was struck by the change in the girl's look and manner: there was a resigned, noble expression in her face, as if, during the last few moments on her father's breast, she had achieved the greatest and hardest victory of all, the victory over self.

“Hannah,” she said, taking the cold, unwilling hand of the other in hers, “you mustn't think father means hardly to you or to—Jack either. 'Tis his love for me, and because—it has come sudden like upon—us both. But oh! you mustn't think we don't both wish and hope you two will be happy. God bless you both, may God bless you!” Here she broke out crying, and put her arm round Hannah's neck, kissing her; “only don't say you don't love Jack, dear! Oh! *try* to love and care for him—he can't be happy without it. Oh! love him, and make him happy for my sake.”

‘No one could have failed to have been touched by this scene. The girl who had been

forsaken, pleading for her lover's happiness with the woman who had taken him from her! I felt ashamed of the doubts that had flitted across my mind a few moments before, and had much ado to wipe away with my wing the tears that were running from my one eye. Even the cold statue she addressed seemed somewhat moved, though it was only a trace of feeling that flickered over her face for an instant.

“You know well, Mary, that my great desire in life is to be a missionary. My father and mother would not let me follow the call, and to go against them I thought wrong. But now, in marrying, I have an opening; for I hear there is much work to be done out there, and John is willing I should do it, provided I will make a home for him. You can rest easy. I shall do my duty by him, as I have done it by my parents.” And with a short “Good-night” she left the room.

“A cold-hearted huzzy, with her ‘call’ there

and her 'call' here," muttered Stevens; "I've no patience with her. Cheer up, my lass," he added, tenderly putting his arm round Mary; "the girl who sticks by an old father, as you've done, is worth a dozen of them stuck up missionary folk."

"Hannah is in earnest, father, and she is good and kind too. But you mustn't talk more to-night; see how tired and faint you are." For Stevens had sunk back in his chair, with a very pale and exhausted look on his face. "Now come, let me get you to bed at once," said Mary.

'And with tender care she waited on him, putting aside her own sorrow bravely as she talked cheerfully to him of the work he was never, alas, to touch again; of the days she fondly and vainly imagined they would spend happily together; not ceasing her cheery words till she saw him laid in his bed, and, like a tired child, sink into sleep.

'Then, when she was within her own little

cupboard,—for it was nothing better,—with the door safely closed, my ears can tell how sadly, and with what terrible bursts of grief, the night wore on for her. I have often thought that bigger troubles are sent to help us to bear smaller ones. This seems a hard saying, but it isn't so hard when one comes to realize it. The big troubles come furnished with angels' wings to lift us nearer heaven; the smaller ones sometimes drag us down too near to earth.

'In the early morning my poor Mary received her crowning touch of sorrow. When she stole into the room in the grey dawn to look at her father sleeping, she found him lying, as she had left him the night before,—sleeping indeed, but it was that deep calm sleep to which there comes no lifting of the eyelids in this life. The strained heart had given way,—so said the doctor when he came; anyhow, in the night, without pain or murmur, in merciful unconsciousness, he had been taken to his rest.

'I will not attempt to tell you of her grief: it

would be impossible to describe the sad scenes through which both she and I passed during the next few days. At times I cannot help thinking and hoping that I—poor, dumb, little one-eyed bird—gave her a shade of comfort. She would take me up, kiss me, and stroke my feathers, murmuring, “Dear little bird, father touched you last;” and then would come a flood of tears at the thought of the dear father’s hand that would never touch hers again.

‘The sting of her lover’s desertion now made itself felt more bitterly than ever.

“Oh, Jack, Jack! if you only knew how lonely I am!” the poor child would sigh.

‘But neither Jack nor Hannah made any further sign, being no doubt fully occupied in marrying and sailing to the distant home.

‘Neither did any one else come near the girl. Stevens had been a man who kept to himself, and had few friends, probably from feeling in some ways a little above the poor set with whom he worked and lived. So, when the parish

buried him, there was only his daughter to follow him to the grave; and in all that crowded neighbourhood, no one came to speak a loving, sympathizing word to the poor wounded heart. She had not even heard from the master for whom Stevens worked: it was known that he was ill, and one hand disappearing for a few days among so many was not a great matter for surprise or comment.

‘Mary had some needlework given her from one or two shops, and was thus able to keep on her little room, so full of tender memories of her father, and of another, it may be, who came there no longer.

‘So the weary days dragged on for a fortnight, —she bending over her work from morning to night, I perched on my shelf, longing—oh, how vainly!—to comfort her. Ah! I thought to myself, there are few who would have acted as she has done! How well she came out, for instance, when that abominable icicle of a woman came here, and *I* doubted her, and thought she

would be mean and spiteful like the rest of them ! And now, how I should like to see her meet that couple—that detestable Jack ! How I loathe the sound of his name ! what dignity, what noble indignation, she would show him for his conduct to her !

‘Rat—tat—tat ; surely I had heard a similar knock to that before. So it seemed, thought Mary ; for, with a startled look, and a flush on her face that I had not seen there for many a day, she turned round from her work, and said, “Come in.”

‘A woman entered, as she had done once before, only I noticed that *this* time she did not close the door behind her.

‘There was the same limp grey cloak, the same close straw bonnet, the same cold Puritanical appearance ; but there was something, too, that was not quite the same. There was a shade of suppressed excitement about her, an almost eager look in her eyes, and an inclination to look back over her shoulder at the half-open door, as if she

thought some one would interrupt her before she had said her say.

“ Mary,” she began hurriedly, and half stammering, “ I’ve come to explain, to tell you all about it; that things are changed; your way,— my way, I mean, is made plain. I am going by myself,—leastways with Mrs. Rawson, the pastor’s wife. Father and mother have given their consent, and—and—Jack”—

‘ Yes, she called him Jack! Alas! I soon saw what Jack was going to do.

‘ There was a blundering sound outside the door; it was flung wide open, and a great brown fellow rushed in.

“ Oh, Jack!”

“ Oh, Mary!”

‘ That was quite enough; away flew all my ideas of dignity and indignation on Mary’s part. That silly, weak-minded little girl had her arms round his neck, and was sobbing, forgiving, and blessing him in one breath; and when I looked round, I found that odious young woman Hannah

had left the room, on her way to Tahiti or Timbuctoo, or some other outlandish locality, and that I alone remained to play gooseberry to this foolish and undignified pair of lovers.'

The Owl stopped; indeed, her indignation was so roused at recalling this touching little scene, that it had almost taken away her breath, and she sat huffing and puffing for some moments in silence.

'But your eye, ma'am?' ventured Puggie at last.

'I am coming to that,' she replied tartly. 'Dear me! how anxious you seem about your neighbour's defects! Well, of course, my eye remained where it always *had* been; and goodness only knows where *that* was,—but not in my head. I suppose it was too much to expect of the child to remember, in her new-born happiness, to hunt in her father's old waistcoat-pocket for it.

'The last time I saw her face was when she wrapped me up with tender care, as she had

unwrapped me before; and the last touch I felt from her fingers was when, as I love to fancy, reluctantly she placed me again in the hands of the master, in the busy place whence I came. There is not much more to tell. I lay by for some time with other things, half finished or badly finished, like myself. Then one day I was bought in a lot with my companions, and our destination was one of those large, cheap, ready-money shops in London. Here our kind mistress found me. I was the only Owl remaining, and she had set her heart on buying one; so, in spite of my infirmity, she brought me among you; and where she has placed me, there I hope to remain. It is true that I do not find great excitement in my present life; but perhaps it is as well that my feelings should not be too much worked upon. You, Mr. Pug, despite an occasional brusqueness, are, I feel sure, my very good friend, while in the companionship of one of my own species,' turning amiably as she spoke to the Swan, 'I feel that I am not entirely bereft

of sympathy and fellow-feeling. May that always continue among our trio, in order to make us ever to each other "wondrous kind."

There was silence for a few moments as the Owl's voice died away in the melancholy wail peculiar to her. Then, as usual, Puggie came to the front.

'Well, it is a very touching story, and very well told too,' he said, bowing to the Owl politely; 'but, begging your pardon, madam, why is it that the best women always seem to pick out either a fool or a brute to bestow their affections upon? Now that Jack, you know'—

'Never mind Jack, if you please, Mr. Pug,' replied the Owl sharply. 'I quite agree with all you can say of him. To tell the truth, he is a sore subject with me; but all I know is, that what I have told you is true. The girl loved him, and married him too. And perhaps the world would be a much more disagreeable place than it is, if the weak people in it fell

into as weak or bad hands as their own. That is *my* way of looking at it.'

Puggie assented, if he did assent, to this way of settling the matter by a dubious kind of snort; then turning, with the air of a master of the ceremonies, to the Swan, who had assumed a modest conscious look during the last five minutes, very much like that of a young lady at a small tea-party, expecting to be asked to sing, he said: 'And now, fair lady, we all await with impatience the fascinating tale that I am sure is ready to pour from your eloquent mouth. I daresay this unwonted flower of speech from me may somewhat surprise you,' he added; 'but after that crushing accusation of "brusqueness" from the wise lady who has just closed her beak, I feel it is necessary to mount guard over my *tongue* as well as over my master's house.'

'Ah!' moaned the Swan, 'my tale is one of guilt and sorrow. True, I have suffered for my sin; and in telling you my story I shall suffer

still more, for it will, it must, cost me your friendship.'

'Never!' cried the Owl and the Pug together. 'But if it will be too much for you'—

'No, no!' interrupted the Swan; 'I must bear my punishment to the full. I have no right any longer to associate with you under false pretences. Only,' she added humbly, 'be merciful to me.

'Long, long ago, in that wonderful time when the world was still very young, I, as a beautiful Swan, rejoicing in a mass of lovely snow-white plumage, might have been seen reposing in stately splendour on the blue waters of a tranquil lake in the happy and lovely island of Sweet Scents, where King Piesse and his gentle Queen Lubina reigned—the best and most beneficent of monarchs.

'In this island the inhabitants lived upon the most delicate perfumes. Nothing grosser in the way of food was known there; and I assure you that, placed as I am now, no small part

of the penance I am enduring consists in the daily sights and odours of the dinner tables of these human beings. I must try and tell you of some of the glories of that happy land whence I came, although I doubt whether I can give you any idea of it, for my tongue seems to fail me as the recollections rush upon me. Fairyland ought to be seen, not described.

‘Can you fancy, then, the most brilliant blue canopy over your head, the most lovely emerald green carpet of the tenderest moss under your feet? Can you imagine trees and flowers, birds and insects of every kind and hue around you, soft purple hills and valleys, and in the far distance fair outlines of snowy mountains flushing in the rosy golden glow of day-time, and shining like angels in the silvery radiance of night? For we have no staring, glaring sun and moon there, as you have here. In the day-time, everything and everybody is surrounded with the gracious golden glow I spoke of: people seem to take their own light with them

wherever they go ; so do all the plants, trees, and animals ; the blue sky sheds the same over all ; while at night the gold is changed to silver, and everything is bathed in a still more lovely radiance.

‘ It is the only change there ever is in Fairy-land, and life flows on like a bit of a sunny stream, that reflects nought but the smiling blue sky above it. One day is exactly like another ; the same joys and pleasures fill up the measure of each ; and yet there is no monotony, as you might suppose, for with the Fairies there is no remembrance. Each returning day, therefore, is to them as a new birth into their world, their happiness is always fresh and strange. Great preparations were being made for the marriage of the fair Princess Rimmella with Prince Bonodeur, son of a neighbouring king. All the spiders in the land set to work spinning the most lovely gossamer robe and veil for the bride ; all the dewdrops, as they caught the first rosy glow of day, were carefully collected

each morning, and woven into it, until the effect was dazlingly beautiful, but still not more beautiful than the sweet form it was meant to adorn. Every flower and fruit sent choice perfume and flavours for the feast that was to be held; presents on all sides flowed in: diamonds like fallen stars from the elves of the mountains, coral and pearls from the mermaidens of the lake, beautiful carpets and hangings of butterfly feathers, presented by the King of the Butterflies, and hundreds of other things of unknown material and manufacture to the dwellers on earth.

‘Every one smiled, laughed, and rejoiced in the happiness awaiting the betrothed pair; and who was more happy and radiant than I, who had been chosen for my glorious and enchanting voice to sing the wedding lay composed by the poet-laureate of the island. Full well I knew the power of my voice; for often had I seen the tears glistening in the eyes of the flowers, heard the trees rustling with emotion,

and watched the silver cups of the water-lilies rocking with delight, as my song was wafted on the morning or evening air.

‘Two nights before the wedding my pride and exultation could be contained no longer, and triumphantly I cried, “Who has a voice like mine? Not even the angels! I—I alone am a queen in the kingdom of singers—who dares to compare with me?” A deep silence followed my boasting cry; but intoxicated with vanity, I heeded it not. So I fell asleep, and in my sleep, sinking deep into my heart, came strains of the most enchanting melody—sad, but unutterably sweet. An almost painful, and until then unknown, feeling of wonder forbade me with gentle force to uncloset my eyes. With the first ray of morn the sounds ceased. Then all nature broke forth in praises of the heavenly songstress of the night, and for the first time my morning song fell on inattentive ears. My breast swelled with anger, pain, envy, and hatred. I swam to the shore, whence in the

night the bewitching strains had seemed to float, and sought eagerly for the songstress. In vain, she was nowhere to be seen.

‘Turning to a Rose whose blossoms were bedewed with tears, I said, “Tell me, thou beautiful Queen of the Flowers, didst thou also last night dream of sweet heavenly music? And knowest thou whence it came?”

““I do,” whispered the Rose, blushing. “It was the Nightingale who sang; she is the most blessed and purest of all songstresses, the brilliant Queen of Melody, and I love her even as my own child.”

““And who has sent her here?” I asked, trying to conceal my rage and wounded vanity.

““I know not,” answered the Rose, “unless it be the angels.”

““Tell her, lovely Rose,” I cried deceitfully, “that I also love her for her glorious voice; tell her to come to me to-night on the crystal waters of the lake, for henceforth our voices must enchant this land together.”

‘ The Rose bowed her lovely head, and promised to do my bidding, but I heard her sigh. “ Ah! sorrow and woe will come of this, only sorrow and woe!”

‘ The night came, brilliant with stars, and in stately pride I rocked myself on the silvery waters, envy and hatred gnawing at my heart. Suddenly I heard a soft flutter of wings, and the next moment, perched on a bud of a water-lily, I saw a small brown bird. Could that be the Nightingale? I looked at her in amazement. What had I, clad in my beautiful snow-white plumage, to fear from that plain, homely appearance? But as I rejoiced in this thought, two eyes sparkling like diamonds were turned on me, while thrilling tones of the most heavenly melody fell on my ear. Then the wicked passion of envy completely overpowered me; I seized her small, fluttering form, and would have cast it into the cold, deep, pitiless waters; but before the evil deed could be accomplished, a sudden faintness and trembling

came over me, the Nightingale escaped from my grasp, and a sad sweet voice uttered these words :

“From this hour shall the divine gift of song be taken from you and your race, only to be restored in the hour of death, when once more you shall be allowed to break into song, and in sweet melodious strains lament the silence of your life. From this land must you be banished for ever, for your wicked, murderous thoughts.”

‘This is all I can recall, for at this point consciousness forsook me, and I awoke to find myself in this mutilated miniature form—the ghost of my former self.’

I noticed that both Puggie and the Owl were at a loss what to say when the Swan ceased speaking. Evidently her tale was more tragic than they had expected, and they scarcely knew how to make the best of it. I pitied the poor bird, who hung her neck dejectedly,

and evidently was prepared for anything severe they might choose to say. And her punishment had indeed been severe; no one could deny that. So I was very glad when Pug, having several times cleared his throat, uttered some polite nothings, and when the Owl, after certain nods and winks, exclaimed:

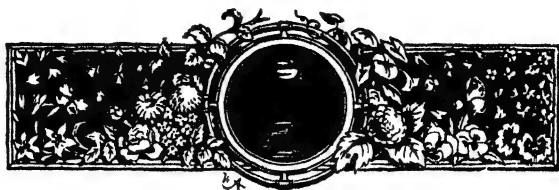
‘Well, well, the moral’s good at any rate, and I am downright sorry for you, friend Swan; indeed I am.’

‘I have deserved my fate,’ was all the answer; and then, to change the subject, the Owl began teasing Puggie for *his* story. But no! he was invincible; he had nothing to tell, or nothing that he would tell, and all persuasion was useless. The Swan, recovering her composure, was about to join her entreaties to those of the Owl, when Puggie settled the question by rolling himself up in a ball, shutting his eyes and ears, and in the space of two or three minutes giving vent to such fearful snores that I fairly beat a retreat, and with a hop,

skip, and a jump, sought shelter in my own room from the distressing sounds. I hope I did not follow his example when I also fell asleep, but this I cannot say. I only know, that when I awoke it was hard to believe that the tales still fresh in my memory had not been revealed in my dreams, instead of, as I verily believe to this day, heard by my very own deaf ears, from the mouths or beaks of my two Cruets.



THE FAIRY LOBELIA.



THE FAIRY LOBELIA.



LARGE-EYED, tender-hearted Fairy has visited the earth to-day for an express purpose. Her slight form wound in and out among the waving green reeds, and to each broad and slender bladed leaf, as they swayed to and fro in the summer breeze, she whispered words which sounded like these: 'A life, a precious human life, will be given you to-day; guard it well, and let no ill come to it.' And as the whisper spread, the green reeds, rustling softly, promised obedience to the command. The Fairy disappeared, and for a time the reeds were quiet. But presently soft, weary steps approached them; they were

gently pushed aside, and a woman, carrying something in her arms, made her way among them.

‘This must be the exact spot,’ she murmured; and the wind, sighing softly through the reeds, seemed to give her the needed answer. ‘Now I must be brave; farewell, my precious child, and may you never live to feel the anguish of heart your mother is now enduring.’ Scarcely trusting herself to look at the sleeping child, the poor woman laid her with tender hands in the thickest part of the reeds, and then slowly turned away, and wended her steps back from whence she came.

Her home was in the middle of a large forest, far away from any other habitation. Most people would have thought it a dreary place to live in, but for the last six months the sunshine of happiness had, as it were, entered into every nook and crevice, irradiating the whole place. But now? Ah! now it looked dismal enough; for a fearful change had come



The poor woman laid her with tender hands in the thickest part of the reeds.

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over it, and the sunshine was for the time completely quenched.

‘Well,’ said a voice, hoarse with suppressed grief, as the woman entered the cottage; ‘well—is she safe?’

‘Yes,’ was the answer, wearily given. ‘I left her where the great Fairy directed. We must be brave, Tristram, and not lose faith and hope; but it is hard, oh, it *is* hard!’

‘If I could only see her once a month, as you will,’ sighed the man, ‘I would be content—almost happy; but to have my sweet baby taken from me for years, and to know that all that time my love for her and the wish to see her will grow stronger day by day—oh! it is *too* hard; and,’ he added bitterly, letting his head fall on his outstretched arms, ‘to know that I have only myself to thank for all this misery, makes it more maddening still.’

Alise—so his wife was called—came up to him, and put her hand tenderly on his arm. ‘Dear husband, we must try and comfort each

other, by knowing that the Fairy Lobelia will take care of our child. I know how hard it will be for you to live without seeing her for so many years; but when you consider how much worse it might have been, you'—

'Yes, yes; I know all that,' interrupted her husband impatiently. 'I daresay I am being treated better than I deserve. I daresay the Fairy might have made harder conditions—perhaps that is what you think—but the conditions seem hard enough to me; and how I can ever fulfil them, and live through the next ten years without seeing my child, is more than I know.'

'It must be done for her sake and for mine, if not for your own,' answered Alise. 'Remember you have given a solemn promise never to try and find out her hiding-place. If you once discover it, all will be lost.'

The man made no reply, only pushed his wife from him, while he buried his face still deeper in his hands; and, with a heavy heart,

Alise prepared the evening meal. Let us now inquire into the cause of their sorrow.

The great and good Fairy Lobelia was Queen over the territory of Fairyland, in which our couple lived. She was not content with merely watching over the physical welfare of her people, but also took the most lively interest in their moral welfare. Now Tristram, from boyhood upwards, had always caused her great trouble. He was both wilful and selfish, and these faults seemed to increase with his years. Moreover, all advice was completely thrown away on him. It so happened that when he was about twenty years of age, the Fairy Lobelia received a visit from a neighbour of hers, by name the Fairy Capricia, who would have been the most charming and fascinating little creature imaginable, had she not been so full of whims and fancies. Her kingdom joined that of Lobelia, and, in the eyes of that sensible Queen, was very badly managed. Things seemed always at sixes and sevens; and it

usually happened that when they arrived at a very bad climax, Capricia took to her wings, and treated her friend Lobelia to a short visit. Lobelia, who had known her from childhood, took a motherly interest in the pretty little creature, and gave her plenty of good advice, which was very seldom taken.

Knowing her flighty ways and sudden freaks, it was always with a sense of relief that she saw her fly home, and knew that her subjects had not suffered from any of her whims and fancies. She was not, however, destined to feel this satisfaction on the occasion of Capricia's last visit. The little Fairy was, as nurses say, 'very contrary,' as she fluttered unexpectedly into Lobelia's realm one bright summer's morn, and her temper was not improved by the intelligence of the Queen's absence in a distant and little known part of her dominions. 'Somehow or other I'll amuse myself,' she thought, and the next moment descended to earth in the form of an ugly, decrepid old woman. 'Now

will I work good or evil to those I meet, according as I am treated,' she said to herself; and no sooner had the thought passed through her mind than Tristram passed by, whistling carelessly as he walked. Turning round, she asked him to help her with a large bundle of faggots she was trying to carry. But Tristram, instead of granting her request, stared rudely at her, and, with a loud laugh, told her he was no servant of old hags. 'I'll give him three chances,' thought the Fairy; and transforming herself into a wild cat, she gave chase to a poor harmless little squirrel, with apparently the most cruel intentions.

Tristram stood still, well pleased at the sight, and in every way urged on the cat in her cruel pursuit. Then Capricia transformed herself into a beautiful young girl, who, with a broken pitcher by her side, was sitting on a mossy bank weeping bitterly. Touched by her beauty, Tristram stopped to inquire into the cause of her grief.

‘I have fallen down, broken my pitcher, spilled my milk, and hurt my foot,’ said the girl; ‘I shall be beaten when I get home, because I have brought no milk, but my foot is so painful I cannot go for any more. Will you fetch me some?’

But Tristram declined the trifling service, saying he had no time to wait on silly girls who were unsteady on their feet. Upon this the indignant little Fairy resumed her original form, and stepping in front of him, commanded him to stop and hear her words.

‘You are both rude, cruel, and selfish,’ she said; ‘faults which no Fairy can forgive. I am sorry for you, but you must suffer, and that severely. Your faults are too deeply engraven to be effaced in any gentle way. Dear me! What can Lobelia have been about, to let such a monster as you grow up in her kingdom?’

Tristram had been gazing open-mouthed at the Fairy, but at these last words indignation got the better of his astonishment, and he exclaimed :

‘Monster indeed! And who are you, I should like to know? The Fairy Lobelia is the only Queen to whom I will pay any respect; and if I’m good enough for her, I’m a great deal too good for you.’

‘Beware, rash mortal!’ said the little Fairy in a dignified tone of voice. ‘Those words have sealed your doom. Now hear it: Your heart is at present incapable of love, but it will not always be so. You will marry,—I can’t say I envy your wife; but I suppose that there are women to be found foolish enough to lavish love even upon such as you. You will care for her in a sort of way, kind enough when she does nothing to vex you, and is, in short, your slave, mind and body. When, however, your child is born, a love far too wonderful for you to understand now will wake up within you, and overwhelm you with its power and intensity. And then—ah! then you will know suffering. The object you love so devotedly shall be taken from you for ever. You have

dared to speak rudely and slightly to a Fairy, and you shall reap the reward! Good-bye, my pleasant friend!' And away flew the angry little Fairy as fast as her wings could carry her, back to Lobelia's palace, where, throwing herself upon a heap of sweet-smelling rose leaves, she indulged in a little nap by way of refreshment after her disagreeable encounter. She was awakened by the arrival of the Fairy Lobelia, who gave her a very kind welcome, and expressed her regret at having been so long absent.

'Ah! my dear, I wish you had been here,' sighed Capricia: 'I should then have been spared a very unpleasant encounter with one of your mortals, the rudest, most selfish, and hateful of beings. I must say, my dear Lobelia, I wonder you allow such creatures to live in your domain. I should positively faint if I possessed such a coarse specimen.' This speech amused the Queen beyond measure; for she well knew that the character of Capricia's sub-

jects was as little known to her as it was to the Man in the Moon, as, unless impelled by a sudden whim, she seldom if ever took the trouble to descend to earth. The amiable Queen, however, only smiled as she begged to be told in what way the unhappy mortal had offended her friend.

Capricia related her adventure; and as she proceeded, the smile died away on Lobelia's face, and her voice was stern as she said :

‘You have done very wrong, Capricia, first in meddling at all with this subject of mine; secondly, in presuming to punish his affront. You should have left that to me to do. Unfortunately, being a Fairy, your words must be fulfilled. Were they of the same nature as your whims and fancies, I would not complain. You have done incalculable mischief, and have probably undone the work of years on my part.’

‘But, my dear Lobelia, you must own that the only fruit shown by this work was of a

decidedly ill-flavoured nature. Really I think it is very hard of you to speak to me in this severe manner. I have saved you a very unpleasant task, and'—

'I have no wish to be saved any unpleasant task that it is my province to perform. This mortal has been known to me from his childhood, and has been no small anxiety. His faults, however, were mine to correct, not yours; and I had thought of a plan that I flatter myself would have worked far better, and would have been a great deal more merciful than yours. Perhaps you did not consider the misery that yours will work to his poor wife, probably a good innocent creature.'

'A poor, weak fool, to marry such a brute,' muttered the naughty little Fairy.

'And with regard to this poor little baby—what are your plans?'

'Oh, my dear Lobelia, I have nothing half so troublesome. Really you mustn't expect me to do *all* your hard work; and besides, you

have taken my poor little help so very much amiss, that I would on no account interfere further with your subjects. If I could have imagined that you were so fond of this hideous monster, I would have let him go on his way in his own selfish, cruel, rude manner. And now, as I see you are determined to be disagreeable to your poor little friend, I will take wing. No, thank you, I would rather *not* have your peacock butterflies. I brought myself here, and I daresay I can take myself back ; but even if I were to faint by the way, I don't suppose you would care very much, your sympathies are so much taken up by this hateful mortal. By the by, instead of his losing his child for the whole of his life, you may shorten the time to ten years if you like, and of course the mother may see the child once a month. There, I can do no more than that, and I heartily wish I had not come here at all to-day ;' and with tears of vexation in her eyes,—for, in spite of her folly, she was really sorry to have

grieved the good, kind Lobelia,—the pretty silly little thing fluttered off to her own domain.

Shortly after these events, Tristram married Alise. She was a very pretty, good girl, and he liked her very much. Still, it was much as Capricia had foretold; he was kind enough to her when she did not thwart or vex him, but there was no self-abnegation in his love. Self was still the prominent feature in his character. Then his child was born, and it was then, for the first time, that the depths of his heart seemed stirred. He had laughed at the Fairy's prophecy; but when this wonderful new feeling took possession of him, he no longer laughed, but trembled. Could it be possible that the threat would be fulfilled, and he deprived of his child?

Hitherto he had not mentioned the subject to his wife; but now he did so, hoping she would dispel his fear with words of ridicule. Alise, however, did nothing of the sort. On the contrary, she was struck dumb with terror; for

she knew that the words of a Fairy could not be recalled, and that the dreaded blow must and would fall. The child was now about six months old; and if she did not lavish upon it the same passionate devotion as did her husband, it was not in reality less dear to her heart. One night, as she was sitting by the cradle, her mind filled with sad forebodings, a strange light crept over the little room, and a form which she recognised as that of the Fairy Lobelia stood before her.

‘Poor Alise!’ said the Fairy kindly. ‘I bring you sad tidings, and unfortunately I am powerless to avert the blow that must fall upon you.’

‘Oh, gracious Queen,’ implored Alise, dropping on her knees, ‘do not say that we must lose our child! You are so great and powerful, cannot you help us?’

‘I cannot set aside the words of another Fairy, any more than that Fairy herself can set them aside; but I can, and will, soften the blow

in some ways. The King of the Frogs is one of my most faithful subjects, and it is at his Court among the green reeds that I have arranged for the little Irma to be placed.'

'Brought up by Frogs!' said Alise, dismayed.

'Frogs are the tenderest of nurses,' replied Lobelia. 'However, she will not be left exclusively to their care. Her hiding-place must be kept a secret from her father: he must in no wise try to discover it; for, if he does so, her ten years' absence will be changed into twenty. You, however, will be allowed to see her once in every month, so that she will never forget you.'

'Thank you! thank you!' cried poor Alise, who sat clasping her child to her heart, wondering how she should be able to part from her.

'To-morrow afternoon,' went on the Fairy, 'you will hear a gentle knock at the door, that will denote the arrival of your Frog guide. Take your baby and go out, and after you have walked a few steps your little guide will

join you. Follow him without fear. Every month he will return to act as your guide, for without his assistance you might never find your way. Keep up your courage, and remember that your husband will have more to bear even than you.'

Lobelia also paid a visit to Tristram, who, on finding that she was powerless to avert the effects of Capricia's anger, relapsed into his usual sulky, boorish temper.

'Come, Tristram, this will never do,' said the Fairy kindly. 'Every misfortune that we bring upon ourselves is hard to bear, but the least we can do is to bear it bravely, and let its effects work upon us for good. Your selfish passionate temper would in all probability have made your child's early years very unhappy. Curb and control it for ten years, and your punishment will not have been in vain.'

'The great love I feel for my child has already cured my selfishness,' answered Tristram; 'there is nothing I would not give up for her.'

‘Would you give up all your comforts, and work night and day in order to keep her?’ asked Lobelia.

‘Yes, yes—gladly. I would live on a dry crust a day, only to see her sweet face when I came home at night.’

‘Would you give one of your eyes to keep her?’

‘Both; for even if I could not see her, I could still touch and hear her. Listen, great Fairy. I am strong, and in full possession of all my members. Strike me down, take all my strength from me, disfigure me, cripple me, do anything you like to me, only leave me my child!’

Thus prayed Tristram with streaming eyes, his hands raised in supplication.

‘Oh, Capricia, why did you ever meddle with my subjects?’ thought Lobelia.

She put one more question to the poor father.

‘If you could make all these sacrifices, Tristram, can you not make one more? Can you not sacrifice your love for the sake of her wel-

fare ? Can you not consent to give her up now, knowing it will be better for her future happiness ?'

But Tristram replied, 'No, no ; I love her too much for that.'

'Then,' said Lobelia, 'your boast is but an empty one, and your selfishness is *not* cured ; for there still remains something that you could not give up for her sake. Now listen. All that I can do is to see that your baby is well cared for, and that its poor mother sees it every month. Beware of discovering its hiding-place : no doubt you will be tempted to do so, but your fate will only be harder for the attempt than it is now.'

The following day, as the Fairy had foretold, Alise, who with her baby in her arms was waiting in speechless, trembling anxiety, heard a gentle knock at the door. She rose and went out into the forest. After a few steps, she suddenly perceived the little Frog guide in front of her. Absorbed in her grief, she scarcely noticed

the way he was leading her. Presently they came to a field of closely-cut, thick green grass. 'Stand still,' said the little Frog, speaking for the first time. Alise obeyed. The grass seemed to recede from her feet, and looking down she saw that she was standing on a door let into the ground. The next moment, to her surprise, she felt herself slowly sinking through it. 'Have no fear,' said the little Frog; 'we shall soon be in the subterranean passage to our Court.' Alise had no eyes at that moment for the wonders she might have seen underground, and the Frog did not stop to point them out, being in a hurry to arrive at his journey's end.

They came to a piece of water where a boat was waiting for them; and no sooner had Alise entered it, than she suddenly found herself above ground again, close to a waving forest of green reeds. Leaving the boat with the Frog, she pushed aside the reeds, and following the directions of her guide, made her way among them to a certain spot, where he told her she must

leave her child. 'I will wait for you here,' said the little Frog, who thought she would like to be alone when wishing her baby good-bye; for he was a Frog of delicate feelings.

The days went by, bringing only an increase of sorrow to Alise's heart. Every hour her husband became more morose and gloomy, and only treated her to harsh words when she tried to rouse him from his grief. At length the time came round for her first visit to King Frog's Court, and with a beating heart she awaited the arrival of her guide. Tristram from one of the upper windows watched her leave the cottage. Such a flood of overwhelming love for his child swept over him, that, in spite of the Fairy's warning, he determined to follow his wife, and try and discover the hiding-place. Alise, engrossed in joyful anticipation, pressed forward eagerly to her destination, and did not think of looking back; it was not until she had arrived at the green field, and was about to sink underground, that she discovered Tristram had fol-

lowed her. Turning round suddenly, she saw him lurking behind a tree.

‘Tristram!’ she exclaimed, both frightened and indignant; ‘go back, I implore you, before it is too late! Have you already forgotten the Fairy Lobelia’s warning? You will only lay up greater misery for yourself.’

‘I *must* see her, or I shall go mad,’ he answered desperately.

Alise sank on her knees before him: ‘Oh, Tristram, I know how hard it is for you, but of what use is it to fight against your fate? Have some pity on me, your wretched wife. Do not I suffer too?’

‘You are better off than I am: you can see her every month.’

‘True; but then’—

‘I know—I know what you are going to say,’ interrupted Tristram angrily. ‘You mean it is the consequence of my own fault. But no—I deny it; it is all owing to a nasty, little, spiteful, malicious’—

‘Oh, hush, hush!’ cried the Frog, trembling in every thin limb; ‘it is dangerous to call a Fairy names.’

‘And who told you to interfere, pray?’ shouted Tristram; and he had just raised his foot to give the little animal a good kick, when a furious gust of wind swept over the whole scene. Alise and the Frog were thrown into the middle of the thick green grass, and Tristram was borne off his feet, and carried so quickly through the air, that his senses forsook him. On awaking to consciousness, he found himself in a region utterly unknown to him. It was a huge hall with high arches, and seemed to stretch for miles and miles away. The spot on which he stood was cold, dark, and dismal; but a little way in advance the atmosphere seemed lighter and pleasanter. As soon as Tristram’s eyes became accustomed to the darkness, he could see innumerable thin shadowy figures flitting about; and trying to catch hold of one of these, he asked where he was. ‘In the Court of the Seasons’ was the

answer, in a voice of such icy coldness that Tristram shivered and shook. 'The King of the Year lives here. You will be taken to his presence presently: but I can't stop to be your guide; for I'm just sent off for a three weeks' sojourn to Earth, a place full of stupid people, who hate me, because they say I've such a biting tongue. It's true I occasionally knock down a few of the old and useless delicate people with it; but Earth can well afford to lose them, with her immense population.'

'What is your name?' asked Tristram, his teeth chattering.

'East Wind' was the answer, as the Sprite disappeared from view.

After wandering about for some little time, Tristram suddenly came face to face with three pretty little Fairies, apparently in great distress of mind. Making them a polite bow—for he had come to the conclusion that it was perhaps a mistake to be rude to Fairies—he inquired into the cause of their grief. Looking more

closely at the small creatures, he saw that one wore a robe of pure white, relieved by a tiny collaret of green round her head, which was bent down; that the second was robed in pale yellow, and the third in bright gold colour. The last-mentioned Fairy seemed the boldest of the three; and while the other two were inclined to shrink away, she looked up and answered Tristram's question.

'You come from Earth, if I mistake not, and will therefore sympathize with the cause of our grief. We weep because the cruel, fierce Queen February will not let us gladden the eyes of mortals with our faces during her reign.' Then, seeing the puzzled expression of Tristram's face, she continued :

'Perhaps you are a stranger here, and do not understand our laws; they are, I know, different from those of the land in which you live. Listen then.'

'Are you not talking too much to a stranger, Cousin Crocus?' whispered the pale Primrose.

And the white Snowdrop raised her head slightly, as if to intimate that she also was of the same opinion. But Tristram, with another polite bow, begged them to allow her to proceed, as he was quite a stranger in the Court of the Seasons, and it was only charitable to enlighten his ignorance.

‘Yes, now don’t be tiresome, and interrupt again,’ said Crocus pettishly; ‘I can’t mope about with you two the whole day long, although my sorrow is just as deep as yours. Before, however, I begin my story, it would perhaps be as well to come into the winter flower-garden. It will be warmer for you, Mr. Mortal, than standing in the cold here.’ And, without waiting for an answer, she led the way into an inner court, the home of the Sprites and Fairies, of the winter shrubs and flowers.

‘There are not many of us here now,’ said Crocus; ‘Holly and Ivy are still on Earth, and in some way or other Violet contrived to creep back there again during Queen January’s reign.

A little underhand conceited flower, I call her ; and the trouble you mortals take to poke about on your hands and feet for her stupid little blossoms, always surprises me. Why can't she show her head like the rest of us ? Modesty indeed ! No, I call it conceit and vanity !'

'Oh, Crocus !' exclaimed Snowdrop, her timidity lost in indignation, and her head no longer drooping, 'do not be so unjust to our poor absent Violet. You never hear her say one unkind word of any one.'

'Tut, tut, child ; pray don't you interfere. Well, Mr. Mortal, as I was about to tell you, when that foolish Primrose interrupted me, it is the law of our land that the King should have a fresh wife every month, and it depends on the tempers of these wives whether you have pleasant or unpleasant weather on Earth. Dear me, did you never hear this fact before ?'

'No,' said Tristram, very much ashamed of his ignorance, 'we have no idea of it down there.'

‘Well, so it is, and unfortunately the King is entirely governed by his wives. He says twelve a year is too many for anybody; and as they all have different tempers, he really can’t pretend to manage them, and their reigns being very short, he just lets them do as they like. Pray, how did Queen January please you on Earth?’

‘Well, really, I hardly know—oh, pretty well, I think,’ said Tristram, perplexed by the sudden question.

‘I mean, was she very fierce with you? did she send you a great deal of ice, snow, and cold winds?’

‘No, I think not; but the fact is, I have been in great trouble lately, and have hardly noticed the weather.’

‘Ah, well! they won’t like Queen February, I’m afraid; for she is a perfect fury. She and the Sun are at daggers drawn, and he is only to show his face on Earth two or three times during her reign. And as for the ice and snow

that are to fall, it is dreadful even to think of! And now I come to our sorrow. Perhaps you, who may remember our grandfathers, may remember a year in which we were not seen on Earth in February; but such a misfortune has never happened before to our generation, and it is a great shame, and very hard on you mortals.'

'You will come in March, I hope,' said Tristram gallantly.

'Yes, but so will many other flowers, such as daisies, anemones, hyacinths, and tulips, among which we shall be lost, besides not being wanted so much then.'

'It is sad to think that the little children will look for us in vain,' said Snowdrop sorrowfully.

'And how the dear woods will miss us on their mossy banks!' chimed in Primrose consolately.

'And what will the Queen of the Frogs do without the Crocus tea she takes to improve her complexion?' cried Crocus.

‘The Queen of the Frogs,’ repeated Tristram eagerly; ‘oh! can you tell me anything about her? Pray do if you can.’

‘Why, what can a mortal like you want to know about a Frog, Queen though she may be?’ asked Crocus, astonished.

‘Ah! kind Fairy, my little daughter is at her Court; she has been taken away from me by a mal—I mean, by the all-powerful Fairy Capricia, and I am not to see her again for ten years.’

‘Why was she taken away?’ asked the three Fairies in chorus. And thereupon Tristram was obliged to relate the whole story; and as he did so, it seemed to strike him for the first time that it was a poor, miserable part he had played in it. Even the volatile Crocus looked grave, especially when he related how he had followed his wife, and the selfish, inconsiderate manner in which he had behaved.

The little Fairies were very sorry for their new friend; but they did not attempt to disguise their opinion of his conduct; and they

told him that no doubt Lobelia, finding he was too weak to keep his promise, had sent him to the Court of the Seasons to be servant for a time to the King and his Queens, and so prevented from working further evil to himself and his poor wife.

At this moment a messenger in search of Tristram arrived from the Queen.

‘You had better hasten to her presence with all speed,’ said the little Sprite; ‘for she happens to be very cross, and won’t like to be kept waiting.’

On approaching the royal chamber, Tristram heard a great noise going on,—shouting, stamping, screaming.

‘That’s the Queen,’ whispered the Sprite; ‘she is in one of her worst tempers to-day, and is doubtless now devising endless miseries for the poor mortals on Earth.’

And as they entered, Tristram heard her shout out to the poor old King, who was writing down her commands :

‘Order more snow, more ice, and unlimited cold winds; do you hear? Cold and gloom; that is what they shall have throughout my reign. Sun indeed? *No*. Flowers indeed? *No*. What’s that you say—how cold the poor wretches will be who have no warm clothes or firing? Well, let them be—let them be cold. Nothing will please me better. I must vent my temper on some one, and it shall be on these poor miserable mortals, who are good for nothing but to suffer. Ha! so *this* is the specimen Lobelia has sent me, is it? Well. So here you are at last. You’ve taken your time before paying your respects, I *must* say. Well; and now what have you got to say for yourself?’

‘Nothing,’ stammered Tristram.

‘So I should think. You look a poor, crushed mouse of a creature. Lobelia described your temper as something alarming; but, dear me, you don’t seem to be blessed with any at all. Come now, at your very best could you make one-half the noise I am making now?’

‘No,’ answered Tristram, shrinking involuntarily from the huge fierce creature who, with wild, disordered, tawny locks, strode up to where he stood, and glared at him like a savage cat.

The Queen’s huge lip curled with contempt as she said, ‘I thought not. Here, take him away and give him some work, the most disagreeable you can find.’ And with these words Tristram was dismissed from the royal presence.

His life during Queen February’s reign could not be called a pleasant one. She was a hard taskmistress, and her delight was to find him work which would be hurtful to the poor mortals on Earth. He often thought of Alise, and of her sweet patient ways ; and as he helped to hurl down ton after ton of snow, he wondered how much of it would fall on his own poor little cottage in the forest, and how his wife would manage to exist through the fearfully severe winter. He had, however, great faith in the kindness of the Fairy Lobelia, and could only hope that she would protect her. And his little baby ?

Oh, yes; he never ceased thinking of her, and his love for her did not diminish. But he bore his punishment more meekly now; for his trials were teaching him patience and unselfishness.

With Queen March's reign came better days. True, her temper was violent at times, but it did not last long; and she allowed the poor little Spring Fairies to fly down to Earth, and deck it as fast as they could with soft shades of green and with bright fresh colours.

Sometimes, when her anger got the better of her, cruel, mischievous Jack Frost was sent down at night to nip and destroy their labour of love, and now and then were sent whirlwinds of dust, which half blinded the poor mortals. But, on the whole, Queen March was more of a lamb than a lion, and her reign came to a close without any great acts of violence having been committed.

Tristram was very sorry to say farewell to Snowdrop, Primrose, and Crocus, with whom he had become great friends; but he looked for-

ward to meeting them again on his return to Earth, and meanwhile they promised to see something of Alise, and, if possible, to get a peep at Baby Irma among the green reeds.

‘The Queen of the Frogs,’ observed Crocus somewhat grandly, ‘is sure either to send an ambassador, or to come to me herself, to solicit some Crocus tea. Dear me, how dreadfully her complexion must have suffered all this time! Should a favourable opportunity present itself, I will make inquiries of her Majesty as to the little Irma’s welfare.’

‘And I,’ whispered the gentle Snowdrop, ‘will ask the Water Lily to carry me to the Court of the Frogs, and will bear tidings to your child of her father’s love.’

‘And I,’ said Primrose, ‘will try and grow near your cottage; and when the good, patient Alise plucks my blossoms, hope and peace shall creep into her heart.’

Tristram thanked them for their kind words of consolation. During the reigns of the

Summer Queens, he made friends with several of the other flower Fairies. Of these, the Daisy, the Moss Rose, and the Forget-me-not were his favourites; and all three promised, when their time came to return to earth, to visit the little Irma. Meanwhile it was faring well with the pretty baby. The frogs took every care of her, proving the kindest and most judicious of nurses; and each time that Alise saw her child, she found her grown in beauty and intelligence. Many were the visitors Irma received. True to her promise, the Snowdrop floated over on the leaf of the Water Lily; and as she drooped her pure white petals over the laughing babe, breathed into her ear words of love from her absent father. And the Crocus, although in a terrible flutter of gratified vanity when receiving her Majesty the Queen of the Frogs, yet did not altogether forget to ask after the health of the little mortal. In time came the Daisy, Forget-me-not, Moss Rose, and all those with whom Tristram had made friends in the Court

of the Seasons. The child grew to love them, and to watch anxiously for their visits as season after season rolled by. Sometimes they would tell her stories which she dearly loved to hear. The cheerful, innocent Daisy, with her red-tipped petals and heart of gold, would prattle of the green fields and meadows, of the tiny snow-white lambs, and of the happy merry children whose especial delight she was, and who sought her for their garlands and flower-chains. The blue Forget-me-not had a sadder tale to tell—an old, old legend, which, happening to the very first of her ancestors, gave her the name she bore. And it was thus the story ran:

A young girl and her lover were wandering one summer's day by the side of a clear running river, when some bright blue blossoms growing in the middle of the stream caught the maiden's eye. 'Oh! gather me some of those lovely flowers,' was her cry. The knight hastened to obey her bidding, and dashed into the water, but the current was too strong for him; he felt

himself sinking, and had only time to throw the bright blue blossoms to his lady-love on the bank, with the words 'Forget me not,' ere he sank in the eddying tide. And ever since the flower has been looked upon 'as a sign to awaken thoughts of friends who are far away.'

With still greater pleasure did Irma hear the legend of the Moss Rose:

'Years, and years, and years ago,' said that lovely flower, 'my ancestors were but common Roses. A strange happiness, however, at length fell to the lot of one of them, a beautiful pale pink creature just blooming into perfection. She was resting on her stalk one summer's morn, drinking in pearly drops of dew, and basking in the glories of the sun, when her vision was suddenly dazzled by brilliant colours, her petals felt the rustle of soft wings, and, lo! a beautiful butterfly was nestling against her very heart.

"Save me! save me!" she whispered breathlessly; "a cruel bird is pursuing me."

'The Rose instantly closed the petals of her

heart round the beautiful fugitive, and thus hid her from the bird, who, perplexed at her sudden disappearance, soared off in another direction.

“You are saved,” said the Rose.

‘The still trembling captive thanked her for the timely protection, saying, “I am a Fairy. What favour can I grant you as proof of my undying gratitude?”’

“Another grace,” answered the Rose, blushing as she made the request.

“It is yours,” said the butterfly, brushing her wings softly against the outer petals of the flower, which were immediately clothed with a light robe of green moss.’

When the winter came, and there were no more flower Fairies to tell Irma stories, the Frogs would try and supply their place, and would croak to her by the hour,—the old ones of their past experiences, the young ones of the joys and sorrows which were to come. Meanwhile five long years were passed, and the Fairy Lobelia resolved to release Tristram from

his weary penance. During this time he had suffered so much from the varieties of tempers he had served under, he had seen how much misery could be inflicted by selfishness, caprice, ill-humour, and violence, that he had learned a never-to-be-forgotten lesson, and his reason as well as his heart showed him the folly of his former conduct. And all this time the love for his little daughter had been steadily increasing, but now it was no longer a selfish love. Alise scarcely knew her husband again, he was so kind and gentle; and if she might only have taken him with her each time she went to see her child, she would have been quite happy. It was hard to meet his wistful eyes when the day came round, and to know how intensely he was longing to see Irma. Alise would willingly have given five years of her own life, could his happiness have been advanced by the sacrifice.

Lobelia knew all this, and her kind heart ached to relieve their sufferings. It so happened that about this time Capricia was paying

her one of her flighty visits; and hoping it might have a good effect upon her, Lobelia resolved she should see the amount of misery she had occasioned. Accordingly, one day she asked her to put on her invisible wings and accompany her to earth. Entering the cottage in the forest, the Queen bade Capricia listen to what was passing. The husband and wife were seated by the table in the middle of the room. Tristram's face was buried in his hands, through which at intervals large tears found their way. A lock of bright golden hair lay before Alise, who ever and anon caressed it with her fingers, as for the thousandth time she painted in glowing words the lovely little face round which it had grown.

‘Five years longer! Oh, Alise, it is such a weary, weary time!’ sighed Tristram, in his turn taking up the little curl and kissing it. ‘How dearly have I not paid for my wicked folly!’

‘Poor man! what is the matter with him?’

what can make him so wretched? Can we not help him, Lobelia?' asked the Fairy Capricia, who was not fond of sad sights.

Lobelia saw that all remembrance of Tristram and his offence had completely passed from the memory of the little creature.

'This is your doing, Capricia,' she said; and her companion opened her eyes very wide as she demanded an explanation.

'Can you remember as far back as five years?' asked Lobelia. But Capricia shook her head, and answered, 'Not if the event to be remembered is an unpleasant one. I make a point of forgetting everything unpleasant as quickly as possible.'

'Then you do not remember being very much offended once with one of my subjects who was very rude to you, and, as a punishment, condemning him to lose his child for ten years, during which time his love for her was to grow and increase to a painful degree?'

'Dear me! No; did I?' asked the little

Fairy incredulously. 'How very spiteful of me, and such a handsome mortal, too! Did I really punish him so cruelly? Are you quite sure you are not making a mistake, Lobelia?'

'Quite sure,' was the answer. 'Oh, Capricia, to think you should have forgotten the misery you showered upon the head of this poor mortal, as readily as you have forgotten the colours on the wings of your last State butterflies!'

'Well, but what can I do? I am really very sorry; why did you let me work ill to him, Lobelia?'

'I was not present to prevent your doing so; you had condemned him to ten years of misery before I knew anything about it; and unfortunately, as you know, the words of a Fairy must be fulfilled.'

'I've an idea—a brilliant idea!' laughed Capricia, clapping her tiny hands. 'It is true that the words of a Fairy must be fulfilled, but they can be fulfilled in any way she pleases; and now it shall please me to change places with

this little child. She shall come home, and this poor, wretched, handsome mortal be made happy, while I will take her form upon me, and spend the next five years wherever she may be. There, my dear Lobelia, will that satisfy you?’

‘Are you in earnest, Capricia?’ asked her astonished friend. ‘Will you spend five years with the Frogs?’

‘Indeed I will; the five years will only be five days to me, you know,—we Fairies live so fast; and I think I can support existence as a happy, laughing, kicking child for that short time. Won’t I lead the yellow Frogs a life! I’ve always detested them—ha! ha! what fun it will be! Now, then, Lobelia, make haste and tell your weeping friend he shall have his child again before daybreak, so that I may hurry off to effect the change. Dear me! I haven’t had such an adventure for ages; I quite long for it to begin.’

The idea was in her volatile little head, and

no amount of reason could remove it. Lobelia knew this, and the thought of Tristram's and Alise's happiness took away all wish to do so. Suddenly revealing herself to the astonished couple, she made known to them Capricia's intention, vanishing almost before they had comprehended the full extent of their happiness. Next morning the little Irma awoke to find herself clasped in her father's arms—the father of whose love she had already heard so much. But the Frogs were completely mystified, and it ever after remained a wonderful event in their annals—the change that one night had wrought in the disposition of the child they were bringing up. For Capricia was very different to Irma. The latter had been gentle, sweet-tempered, and obedient; the former was as wild and wilful as the wind, and as variable as a weathercock. In truth, she led the poor Frogs a nice life, and well-nigh ruined the Queen's complexion for ever, spite of double-distilled Crocus tea, by the sleepless nights caused by

her waywardness and naughtiness. In vain did the whole Court strive to discover the reason of this unpleasant change in the child's disposition. Only the green reeds, from whom ever since the days of Midas no secret can be hidden, knew the truth; and ever and anon, as they waved to and fro in the summer breezes, or were violently agitated by the cold blast of winter, a rustling whisper would reach the ears of the perplexed and aggravated Frogs, and these were the words it bore:

‘We know, we know, but we mustn’t tell.’



KING BOO'S NURSERY.



KING BOO'S NURSERY.

DEAR me! what a noise little Fairies can make if they choose! The ordinary idea is, that a Fairy's voice must always be sweet and low, a Fairy's movements always quiet,—that such a thing as noise would be too much for a Fairy in every way. Ah! but then, you see, we only catch sight of full-grown sedate Fairies, and of them, perhaps, only once or twice in our lives; but come with me into a certain Fairy nursery of which I know, and then you will see what *young* Fairies are like.

‘They spring, they shout, in merry play,
They frolic in the air,
And dance the golden hours away,
Without a thought of care.

‘Ah! happy Sprites, have now your day,
Ere come the gloomy years,
When age shall seize you for his prey,
And pain bring forth your tears.’

Oh! what a state the nursery was in! How could it ever be made tidy again? The floor was one mass of flower petals, with which the Fairies had been pelting each other; the tables and chairs—not made of wood like ours, of course, but such as are used in Fairyland—were broken and strewn about the room; in short, everything was in a state of the utmost disorder.

In the midst of the din and hubbub, the nursery door opened, a little form entered, and a poor plaintive little voice strove to make itself heard. ‘Fays, Fays, be quiet, I want to speak to you; leave off shouting and screaming for a moment, and listen to me.’

The poor little plaintive voice had to say these words over and over again, before any attention was paid to them. At last came a lull,

and then it spoke again: 'Oh, Fays, Fays, how can you be so very naughty? You know I begged you not to make a great deal of noise, because the King is at home to-day, and it makes him so very angry; and—oh dear! oh dear! what a mess you have made! and, oh dear! oh dear! broken the chairs and tables, I do declare. Fays, Fays, what is to be done? how could you be so very naughty?'

The small Fairies hung their heads, abashed for the moment by the mournful little voice; then one and all began making excuses, laying the blame on each other; and in doing this their voices grew so shrill and noisy again, that the plaintive little Fairy shuddered lest the uproar was about to recommence.

'Well, well,' she said, 'don't quarrel, but do your best to make things straight. Pick up all these petals, and put the broken chairs and tables together, and I'll try and get them mended before the King sees them. Now I must go to him.'

The Fays promised obedience ; but I am sorry to say that the first thing they did, after poor Justicia had left the nursery, was to join hands, and dance round and round, singing at the top of their voices :

‘ Oh, stupid old Juss ! oh, stupid old Juss !
You’re always coming and making a fuss.
For the King we don’t care,
Though we own he’s a bear.
Still he’ll not turn us out ;
Though he’d like to, no doubt.
So we’ll thump and we’ll bump,
And we won’t care a dump
For all you may say ; oh, stupid old Juss !
You’re always coming and making a fuss.’

‘ Hullo, hullo, Fays ! what a noise you are making !’ And this time the voice that interrupted their antics was clear, strong, and cheerful, and had the effect of immediately stopping both song and dance. There was a shout of delight, and in an instant the little Fays had surrounded the new-comer, and were scrambling all over him. ‘ Ulfva, Ulfva, is it really you ? What a long time you have been away ! Where

have you been? when did you come back? Oh! how very glad we are!’

‘Well, don’t quite throttle me,’ laughed Ulfva, striving to free himself from their boisterous embraces. ‘Now do be quiet, sensible little Fays, and I’ll answer all your questions.’

And now a wonderful calm reigned in the nursery, as Ulfva began to relate his adventures; so wonderful a calm, that it alarmed Justice almost as much as the hubbub, and with a weary sigh she hurried back to the nursery, fearing some dreadful mischief must be brewing. The Fays were listening too intently to notice her entrance, and for a moment or two Ulfva was also ignorant of it. No one, therefore, saw the wonderful change that passed over the sad, plaintive little face, as she looked into the room and heard Ulfva’s voice. He had come back then—he whom she loved so dearly, and who was always ready to help her in all her troubles; and like magic, the sad, weary expression fled from her face, and was replaced by smiles and blushes.

Ulfva looked up, and, seeing her, sprang to greet her. 'Justicia, dear little creature, I am so glad to see you!' Justicia was too happy to make any answer, but she looked at him with her soft brown eyes, and he did not seem to miss the words.

'Have you been well and happy, Justicia, or have these naughty Fays teased you to death?'

'Not quite,' said Justicia, who at this moment could have forgiven her bitterest enemy. 'Oh, Ulfva! I thought you were never coming back, it is so very long since you left us.'

'I must tell you all my adventures,' said Ulfva; 'but, alas, I shall not have much time, for I must soon take flight again.'

'Again, and soon?'

'Yes; for my task is not yet accomplished; the six Princesses are still under enchantment, and I have sworn to deliver them. You would not keep me back, Justicia?'

'No,' said the little creature faintly, her head

drooping, and all the life and happiness fading from her face.

‘Cheer up,’ said Ulfva, ‘a day will come’— But he was interrupted by a sound which made Justicia spring from his side, swift as an arrow : it was only the sound of a yawn, but it was a huge, angry yawn, and it told Justicia that the King was awake, and that she must return to him.

Perhaps it may not be generally known, that when Fairies do anything very wrong, they turn into Ogres, and are banished by law to a distant part of Fairyland. This had been the case with King Amergris. He had indulged in all kind of wicked passions, and had committed a great many crimes, and now had become an ugly old Ogre, and was sent into exile under the name of King Boo. His niece Justicia had always lived with him, and would not desert him in his troubles.

At the time of which I am writing, a very economical government reigned in Fairyland,

and everybody and everything was utilized to its fullest extent. When, therefore, old King Boo was banished, the Government thought they would still make him of use ; and, without troubling their heads as to his fitness or non-fitness for the post, they made him the manager of a nursery in his new domain, to which were sent all the naughtiest and most unmanageable Fays in Fairyland.

‘If you are not good *this moment*, you shall be sent off to King Boo,’ was a common threat with the nurses, and very often it had its due effect. Still there were certain Fays too intractable to care for any number of threats, and these had to be sent to King Boo’s nursery. Poor Justicia had the charge of them, and a more trying task can hardly be imagined. They were very naughty and very ungrateful ; but she had a soft heart, and could not bear to see them punished. Consequently her great aim and object was to keep their misdeeds concealed from the old King ; and to effect this, she constantly bore the weight

of his anger herself. The poor little Fairy passed a weary life between King Boo and the riotous Fays, especially when Ulfva was away; for he was her one friend and comfort. He was an adopted son of King Boo's, and had, with Justicia, followed him into exile; but lately he had been away from the nursery, searching for six Fairy Princesses who had suddenly disappeared from their father's Court. All the young Fairy Princes in the land thought it their duty to go forth in search of them, but hitherto their efforts had been unsuccessful. The greatest honours of the land were to befall the successful hero. How Justicia hoped it might be Ulfva! although she felt that then he would be even further removed from her than he already was by his beauty and brave deeds; for the little creature had a very humble opinion of her own merits and attractions, and little knew how beautiful she was in Ulfva's eyes, or how dear to his heart.

‘If he rescues the Princesses, he will marry

the most beautiful of them,' she would think to herself, and very sad the thought made her; still she knew she could bear any suffering, if only Ulfva was happy. The time came, all too soon, for him to depart.

'When will you come back?' asked poor little Justicia with mournful eyes, as he bade her farewell.

'When I have found the Princesses,' was his answer; and raising her hand to his lips, he kissed it tenderly. 'No one else must find them, Justicia, or I shall feel myself disgraced for ever.' And with these words, Ulfva went his way, leaving a very sorrowful little Fairy behind.

Justicia, however, had no time to spend in weeping or lamenting: there was the King to attend and pacify, and the Fays to scold, caress, punish, or reward, as the case might be—to *console*, most certainly; for they were one and all devoted to Ulfva, and his departure was a great grief to them.

When all was quiet for the night, and Justicia

no longer needed, she crept softly out from the Fairy nursery, and wandered into the beautiful garden which surrounded it. Here she was sure of a warm welcome; for the Flower Fairies all knew and loved her. To-night, however, she did not speak to many of them; for her visit was to her especial friend, the Fairy of the Gentianella, and she had but little time to spare.

Totally different in many respects from Justicia was the dreamy, poetical Sprite who dwelt in this lovely flower. Her chosen friends, although they might differ in rank and degree, were in one respect alike,—all were intellectual or high-minded. The Gentianella was not only clever herself, but quick at seeing and recognising genius and the best qualities of the heart in others. Perhaps her greatest friend was the Lark, who, it so happened, had this very evening flown down to pay her a visit, and was still there when Justicia arrived.

‘Ah!’ said the Gentianella, greeting her with

affection; 'I am so glad to see you! The Lark has been telling me such beautiful stories; I wish you had heard them! One in particular interested me deeply, as it explains the origin of my deep blue hue.'

'Do tell it to me,' begged Justicia of the Lark, who, making a polite bow, began as follows:

'Many thousands of years ago, an ancestor of mine was one morning hopping about a garden in search of a breakfast. It was very early, and most of the flowers were still sleeping, the dew sparkling brightly on their leaves and blossoms. A faint cry startled my ancestor; and looking round, he saw that it came from a pale whitish blue flower with a very deep bell, into which a large worm was trying to force its way.

"Save me, save me!" cried the Flower; "this huge creature will break my delicate petals."

'My ancestor needed no further entreaty; he was both polite and hungry. To pounce on the worm was the work of a moment. Having dis-

posed of him, he wiped his bill in some grass, listened to the gratitude expressed by the Flower, and in his turn thanked her for a good breakfast.

“Can I render you any other service?” he asked before soaring up into the sky.

“Could you but take me with you!” cried the Flower; “I would gladly give my life once to touch the clouds. All day long I lie close to earth; but I am always looking up and longing to rise.”

“Come with me,” said my ancestor; and taking her on his back, he soared up with her into the bright sky, on and on towards the white and blue clouds.

‘A deep blue cloudlet came dancing down to meet them.

“Oh, Cloud, spare me a little of your beautiful colour, and I shall die happy,” implored the Gentianella, faint with excess of happiness.

‘The Cloudlet was young and generous.

“Give her some,” she said to the Lark, who

broke off a tiny piece with his bill, and placed it in the trembling Flower's bell.

“To earth; take me back now to die,” breathed the Flower still more faintly; and my ancestor bore her back to her home, and placed her gently among the leaves, marvelling at the wonderful change that had been wrought in her hue.

“I am dying,” said the Gentianella, “but I am happy, for I have been among the deep-blue clouds, and my descendants will for ever bear their colour.”

‘My ancestor mourned for the Flower whom too much honour had killed, and ever since that time a fast friendship has existed between high-soaring Larks and high-souled Gentianellas.’

When the Lark had taken his leave and flown away, Justicia told the Gentianella of Ulfva's hasty visit and departure, and of her own unhappiness.

‘I dreamt of him and of his search last night,’ said the Blue Flower; ‘and much I fear

that many difficulties await him ; still, even if this be so, you must be content, knowing that he is young, brave, and strong.'

'But oh ! I love him so much !' sighed Justicia.

'And he loves you,' said her friend.

'Perhaps—I am not sure—he may now a little, but when'—

She was interrupted by seeing a beautiful little bird perch on a myrtle tree close to where she was standing ; its plumage was of a bright deep red hue. It began to sing, and to Justicia the song sounded thus :

'Many are the loving thoughts
In Ulfva's heart for thee ;
Some contrive to fly away
His Fairy love to see.

'No Princess, however fair,
Could turn his heart away ;
Have no fear, and cease to grieve,
Joy soon with thee will stay.

'Love's messenger behold in me,
His type the ruby bright ;
I deck me with its glowing hue,
And haste to thee my flight.'

The Fairy of the Gentianella only heard unusually sweet strains, but the words were distinct to Justicia's ear; and too happy and agitated to speak, she could only caress the little bird with a trembling lip and hand. Apparently it understood the silent language of love, for it nestled in her breast and perched on her shoulder, and did not leave her until she had quitted the beautiful garden, and once more entered King Boo's nursery. Then it bid her a tender farewell, and flew away back to the distant land where Ulfva was searching for the six Princesses. After that, many were the loving thoughts which, in one form or another, found their way to Justicia. Did she feel unusually sad and despondent, something out of the common, either a beautiful Butterfly, a bird, or a pure white blossom, would meet her gaze, and comfort her in some unlooked for and strange way. There came, however, a time when all these signs ceased,—a blank, dismal time indeed for the poor little Fairy, when

even words of comfort from the Lark and the Gentianella failed to reach her heart.

Meanwhile Ulfva had arrived in the land of Bigheads, where dwelt a peculiar race of people, whose heads increased in size according to the amount of learning and knowledge which they acquired. As he entered the city and saw these extraordinary beings moving about, he was so much struck by their grotesque appearance, that he stood still and laughed aloud. Their heads differed in shape as well as in size, and were flat, round, narrow, broad, and pointed, so that in truth they looked an odd set of people. It was some time before he could make up his mind to address one of the inhabitants; but at length, choosing the smallest head he could see, he ventured to ask if any information could be given him of the six missing Princesses.

‘That’s a question to be answered by a larger head than mine,’ was the reply. ‘Come with me, and I will get you speech of our

King, who alone can give you any information on the subject.'

Ulfva followed his strange-looking guide, to whom he said, as they went along, 'How glad you must be, that your head is among the small ones in the kingdom!'

'Well, I don't know about being glad,' said his guide. 'You see, a small head is considered a disgrace here, and I ought to feel very much ashamed of having one. I can't say I care much, however, for I am a happy-go-lucky sort of fellow, born with so thick a skull that there is very little room for much learning in it, and it won't stretch, as most of them do. Our King's skull is just like indiarubber, and every year his head gets bigger and bigger. I only hope it won't crack one of these days.'

'Does that ever happen?' asked Ulfva.

'Oh, yes; if the skull is not of a very superior description. We have an island belonging to our kingdom, to which all the crack-skulled subjects are sent. It is a curious sight to see

them walking about, their heads shrivelling up gradually or rapidly, according to the nature of the crack; some lose all their contents at once, others by degrees. Well, I don't think mine will ever crack!

'I hope not indeed,' said Ulfva. 'Do the wives have big heads also?'

'Some of them. As a rule, you will find that the largest Bigheads choose wives with very small heads, and that small Bigheads choose wives with large heads. My wife has an enormous one, and it is very convenient, as it saves me so much trouble: she knows everything and manages everything, and I am free to amuse myself all day long. But here we are at the Palace. Now, prepare to be astonished. Stay—hullo! what can all this uproar be about?'

They were drawing near to the Palace as he spoke, and signs of a great commotion were visible,—big heads, small heads, and gigantic heads darting about and rushing to and fro in the most excited manner.

‘The King’s head, the King’s head!’ were the only words Ulfva could at first distinguish amid the hubbub of voices. ‘Twenty Bigheads are holding it to keep it from cracking; but only the touch of a Fairy’s finger can really save it, and that is not to be had. What can be done? What can be done?’

‘Is this really so?’ asked Ulfva of his guide, who answered mournfully :

‘Yes, alas! it is. Oh, our poor King!’

‘Your lucky King, you should say,’ said Ulfva; ‘for you must know, my kind friend, that I am a Fairy, and the touch of my finger shall save his poor skull from cracking.’

‘*You* a Fairy? I thought there was something out of the common about you. Come along, come along! Here, place there! Make way,—a Fairy comes to save our King’s head!’

The people started aside and stared at Ulfva; but on seeing his guide they only laughed, and, shrugging their shoulders, said—

‘Tush ; it is only some of that foolish Pin’s Head’s nonsense. Really he ought to be banished from the kingdom ; the size of his head is too contemptible !’

‘No fear of yours ever bursting with wisdom,’ was the retort of Pin’s Head’s wife, the cleverest of all the female Bigheads. ‘He is talking better sense now than you are ; for his companion is a Fairy, and no mistake ; I can see that plainly enough.’ And in consequence of her fortunate intervention, the crowd made way for Ulfva, and he was ushered into the presence of the King, who was seated on his throne, groaning frightfully with pain and terror, while twenty of his subjects were propping up his enormous head, hoping thus to save it from cracking.

In the twinkling of an eye Ulfva had clambered up the huge face, and under the touch of his soft little hands the throbbing and racking agony were rapidly disappearing. There was no longer any fear that the King’s head would crack, and

the props fell off one by one, as they saw the magical spell working.

The Monarch gave three or four deep-drawn sighs of relief; and Ulfva, clambering down from his high perch, knelt on one knee and made his petition :

‘O wise King of the Bigheads, in return for the service I have been fortunate enough to render you, tell me, I pray, the hiding-place of the six missing Princesses.’

‘Is there no easier favour you can ask?’ inquired the King. ‘It might perhaps be possible for me to give you some information on the subject; but in order to do so, I should have to search the most distant corners of my head, and I fear the effort might cause it to crack.’

‘No fear of that, great King, while I am here to soothe the pain,’ answered Ulfva.

Not wishing to appear ungrateful, the King began thinking and hunting in every corner of his head for the desired information; and every

now and then he would scream out, 'It is going to crack—I know it is!' And then the twenty props would fly to him to hold his head; and Ulfva's little hands would begin their work, and quickly dispel the alarming symptoms. Presently the King began muttering to himself:

'Six white Swans,
Six black Tongs,
Six old Croncs
Munching bones.'

'There—that's all the information I can give you, and a great trouble it has been to search it out. You must travel on and on, until you find six Swans, six Tongs, six Croncs, and six Bones, in connection with each other. Then you will be near the solution of the difficulty.' Ulfva thanked him most humbly; and having taken an affectionate leave of Pin's Head, he left the city of the Bigheads, and once more resumed his travels.

The information he had received was certainly scanty; still it was better than nothing, and he

felt more hopeful than he had done for many days past. Knowing how important it was to have every sense on the alert, he now tried to keep his mind free from even loving thoughts of Justicia; and this was the beginning of the blank, dismal time endured by the poor little Fairy.

But all things come to an end at last, if we wait long enough; and one day, after a long weary time had come and gone since leaving the City of the Bigheads, Ulfva found himself in a wild, dreary tract of country. The sun was setting, and the air was strangely still and quiet.

Suddenly he saw a white object in the far distance, and he knew it to be a Swan. 'If one Swan, why not six?' he said to himself, hope rising in his breast at the sight, and he hastened on towards the bird.

On his way he saw a pair of Tongs, saddled and bridled, and seated on the ground a few yards off, an old Crone munching bones. 'One Swan, one pair of Tongs, one old Crone munch-



Seated on the ground, a few yards off, was an old Crone munching bones.

ing bones ; why not six Swans, six Tongs, six Crones munching bones ?' said Ulfva to himself, elated at the sight ; and stopping in front of the old Crone, he made her a polite bow, and asked for the latest news of Witchland. A sharp, suspicious glance was cast at him ; then—' Tongs are the fashion to ride, broomsticks are out of favour.'

' Nothing more ?' asked Ulfva.

' Bones very tough,' quoth the old hag.

' Swans are tenderer eating,' suggested Ulfva ; upon which the old Crone shook her head angrily, but vouchsafed no answer.

Ulfva began to sing :

' Six white Swans,
Six black Tongs,
Six old Crones
Munching bones,'—

dancing round and round the old creature ; and as he sang, a rushing sound as of wings filled the air, and six Swans came sailing along towards him, pursued by five old Crones riding black tongs, and busily employed in munching

bones. The sixth Crone immediately uttered a cry of rage and despair, and throwing herself on to her pair of tongs with all imaginable speed, mounted into the air to join the others. Then commenced a desperate battle between the Swans and the Witches. Ulfva transformed himself into a dragon with six heads, and sprang up into the air to befriend the Swans. The Witches were hard to conquer, but finally succumbed before the fiery tongues of the Dragon, and the blows given by the strong wings of the Swans. They shrivelled up, and faded away in the air; and no sooner had all trace of them disappeared, than the Swans sank to the ground and regained their original forms, which were those of the six missing Princesses. Ulfva stood before them, amazed and enraptured by their beauty; and they, on the other hand, could not sufficiently express their gratitude to him for having effected their deliverance.

The five eldest Princesses were already betrothed when stolen away by the Witches; but

the youngest, the large-eyed, golden-haired Delphina, had never before seen any one on whom she felt inclined to bestow her heart. Now, however, she did what seemed the proper thing to do under the circumstances: she fell in love with her handsome young deliverer.

The King was, of course, enchanted to see his daughters again: he heaped honour after honour upon Ulfva, and at once proposed to give him Delphina in marriage; but the Fairy Prince was true to Justicia, and explained to the King that he could not possibly accept the proposed honour. Delphina, furious at the answer, desired that Ulfva should at once be thrown into prison; but the King could not make up his mind to be so cruel and ungrateful, and all he would consent to was to detain Ulfva at his Court, hoping that he might change his mind. The Prince, however, had no inclination to do so. If at first he had been somewhat dazzled by Delphina's great beauty, he was so no longer; and every day he longed more and more to

return to his little Justicia, and wondered how she was faring among the naughty Fays.

Alas! not one of his loving thoughts now reached the disconsolate Fairy, for Delphina intercepted them; and in whatever form the thought was clad, she ruthlessly destroyed it. The Princess was walking in her flower garden, bemoaning her sad fate, when the first thought, a bright-plumaged little bird, flew across the path, and perched on a rose tree.

‘Attracted by its beauty, Delphina caught it in her hand.

‘Let me go, let me go,’ chirped the bird. ‘I am a loving thought sent from Ulfva to Justicia. Do not hurt me.’

A malicious smile was the only answer vouchsafed by Delphina; but the little bird chirped no longer, for she had crushed him in her hand. After that time she watched eagerly for other loving thoughts, and she set spies to watch as well. One spy was a large, fierce, yellow cat, who was commanded to kill all the brilliant-

plumaged birds he might see; another was a cruel, sharp-beaked parrot, who, if he saw a bright-winged butterfly or pure white flower, immediately destroyed it. Meanwhile the Princess changed her manner to Ulfva, and pretended she was only anxious to be his friend. Every week she made her father invent some fresh reason for delaying his departure, and every week Ulfva determined he would go away the next; but when the next week came, he was sure to be asked to perform some important act of bravery or kindness which it was impossible for him to refuse; and so he stayed on and on, and Delphina's heart grew hopeful, while that of Justicia grew heavier and heavier. She knew where Ulfva was, but she was too proud and shy to send him any loving thoughts; for she thought that her sad predictions were verified, and that he no longer cared for her. And at last she resolved to think more of his happiness than of her own, and every day she told her heart that she was glad Ulfva was

going to marry the beautiful Princess; but somehow her heart did not quite believe it, and that made her very angry. The Gentianella did her best to console her, but failed, from being unable to sympathize with her; for, to the Fairy of the Blue Flower, to love without return seemed an impossibility. As easily as she would have shaken a dew-drop from her blue bell would she have dismissed the feeling. The Lark treated the matter differently. He did not venture directly to allude to Justicia's grief, but he tried to lead her beyond it: he told her of all that he saw in the higher atmosphere in which he soared; he sang of self-sacrifice and high resolves; and while he thus sang, the little Fairy's heart swelled within her, and she felt capable of any, even of the greatest sacrifice.

And thus time passed by, and all hope of Ulfva's return died out of her heart. The Fays were as naughty and disobedient as ever, the old King as tyrannical; but now these troubles no longer vexed Justicia as they had done. If

possible, she was more patient, more gentle, and more forbearing than she had ever been. 'Never mind, it is only I who suffer,' she would say to herself; and the thought seemed to give her strength for all she had to undergo.

A change, however, was at hand. One day Justicia was in the lovely garden, and never before—so it appeared to her—had the flowers looked so bright, never had their scent been more delightful, never had they smiled on her so sweet a welcome. Even the little daisies were anxious to attract attention to day; for, as she stood in the fresh green grass, which was thickly gemmed with them, they bent forward their stems, and rested their pretty silvery heads and pink buds on her tiny feet. Crystal drops shone in the deep blue cup of the *Gentianella*, and her fragile form shook with agitation, while high up in the sky the Lark was singing as he had never sung before. Justicia stood entranced in the daisy-sprinkled grass, listening to the thrilling notes that were filling her heart with

wondrously beautiful thoughts and feelings, which, though only dimly and mysteriously understood, caused a strange dreamy happiness to float over her.

‘Yes, yes,’ she murmured softly, ‘there is something higher than happiness; is it sorrow, I wonder? Anyhow, it matters not, so long as I am the only sufferer.’

Softly as the words had been uttered, they had yet been overheard; the daisied grass was pressed by other feet than hers, and a voice behind her answered, ‘Come happiness, come sorrow, we will bear it together, my Justicia; for I have escaped all danger and temptation, and have come back to you for ever.’

Filled to the brim now with crystal drops was the Gentianella’s blue cup, and the Lark hushed his joyous song, feeling that silence would be far more eloquent. Perhaps, too, he might have imagined that, clasped in Ulfva’s arms, Justicia would hear nought but the beating of her own tender happy little heart.

THE GOOD OLD RABBIT.



THE GOOD OLD RABBIT.

IT is not perhaps often that you see a *very* old Rabbit; but in a certain wood known only to me, there once lived one so very old that he could scarcely remember the days of his youth. How he had escaped being snared or shot was a constant source of surprise to all who knew him, for he never seemed to avoid danger, and in his younger days might always have been found foremost in any fun or frolic that was going on in the Rabbit world. At length it was decided that he must bear a charmed life, and he began to think so himself, and to wonder why it was. One day,

as he was basking in the sun, at a little distance from his burrow, he fell to thinking and wondering about the length of his days; and turning to a graceful Lady Fern whom he knew always spoke the truth, he asked her if she could solve the problem for him.

‘Yes,’ answered the Fern softly, ‘I think I can. It must be that this long and happy life is a reward for the kindness with which you have always treated others.’

‘If I did not know your well-known character for truth, Lady Fern, I should think you were flattering me, and trying to turn my old head,’ said the Rabbit modestly.

‘Not at all,’ replied the Fern; ‘have you not always been kindness itself to us, in sparing our youngest and tenderest green shoots, although, of course, they are the sweetest, and those most greedily devoured by your race?’

‘Well, well,’ said the Rabbit, ‘but there is little merit in that, surely; it is bad enough to be obliged to eat other people’s children in

order to live, without choosing the youngest and the prettiest.'

'Ah!' piped a blade of Grass, 'we know also how kind you are to *our* children, dear Rabbit; for when you wish to rest, you never crush their slender forms, but, however tired you may be, you go on farther, till you find blades too strong for you to crush.'

'Dear me,' said the Rabbit, 'is that a merit? What! crush your poor little children with my heavy old body! No indeed; that *would* be unnecessary cruelty!'

An aged Dormouse, who was listening to the conversation, now added her share in a drowsy voice: 'I can also speak of your kindness, Mr. Rabbit; for well I remember how, in the days of your youth, you refused to join the other mischievous young Rabbits in playing at football with our poor little ones in the winter months, when they had curled themselves up and gone to sleep.'

'I should think so, indeed!' exclaimed the

Rabbit, his old eyes lighting up with indignation at the remembrance. 'Why, that was cruel sport indeed, for the poor little victims often had their backs broken ; or, if they escaped this fate, were weak and sickly for the rest of their lives. Call that sport ? No indeed ! I must say they looked tempting balls enough, rolled up so roundly and firmly ; but, poor, tiny, soft, velvety creatures, I would sooner have lost my little white tuft than have kicked one up in the air !'

Now Rabbits value this same white tuft beyond description, so that this was a great deal for him to say ; but still it was no more than he meant, as his hearers knew.

'I too,' quoth the Snail, putting out his horns, 'must add my word of thanks, good Rabbit, for myself and my race. *You* have never given us smart raps with your paws, and broken our shells, just for the fun of seeing how we should look without our houses ! Ah, but I have often seen this done by other Rabbits, and watched them gambol off in fits of laughter at our forlorn

condition. Fun indeed! I've no patience with such behaviour.'

'Nor I,' replied the Rabbit. 'Well, many thanks to you all, my friends, for your kind words, although I cannot feel that I deserve them, for I have done so very little; nothing that is really good, you know.'

But to this his friends would not agree; and, thanking them again, the Rabbit trotted slowly home, pondering over all that had been said, and wishing he could do one really good action before his long life came to an end.

On the bank, just above his burrow, was sitting a little fair-haired girl crying bitterly. The sight distressed the tender-hearted Rabbit; and although human beings were not much in his way, he could not forbear showing his sympathy in this case, by approaching the little girl, and rubbing his nose gently against her hand. She started at the touch, and gave a scream of surprise and delight on seeing the Rabbit, on whose tuft she immediately sprinkled

some grains of salt, crying out gleefully, as she clutched him round the neck with the other hand, 'I've done it! I've done it! Now I've caught you, and grandmother will have something to eat.'

The poor old Rabbit trembled. 'Was this, then, to be his end after so many happy years? Was he to turn into food for an old woman? A sad look came into his old eyes; still he did not try to escape from the child's grasp, and she, putting down her little face to his, exclaimed sorrowfully, 'Oh! but how shall I ever kill you? for you are the dearest, tamest, most loving old Bunny I ever did see; oh dear! oh dear!'

'Never mind, little girl,' said the Rabbit gently. 'You may do what you like with me; only—only—if your grandmother is old and ill, I am afraid she will find me *very* tough.'

'Yes, she is *very* old and ill, and she has nothing to eat. So I said I should take some salt and put it on a bird or a rabbit's tail, for I had heard that was the way to catch them;



Never mind, little Girl,' said the Rabbit ; ' you may do what you like with me.'

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and so it is, for I caught *you*, you see; but—but oh! I don't think I *can* kill you, you dear talking Bunny.'

'Well, suppose we go back to grandmother and see what can be done.' And off they started, the Rabbit taking one last fond look at his old home, for he thought that very likely he should never enter it again. And he never did.

An old, old woman was picking up sticks in front of the cottage door.

'What is that with you? I can't see very well?' she asked the little girl, peering at the Rabbit with her small red eyes.

'A creature from the forest,' answered the child.

'And is he to save the life of your grandmother?'

The child was silent, and large tears rolled slowly down her cheeks. The old woman turned to the Rabbit.

'Are you ready to save a human life?' she asked, taking up a large knife that lay on the ground.

‘Yes,’ he replied bravely, ‘I am ready. Have I not wished to be of some real use before ending my life? Good-bye, dear little girl, don’t cry. I die to save your grandmother.’

And he shut his eyes, patiently waiting for the stroke of the cruel knife. But it did not come, and presently a voice said: ‘Look up, my good, brave Rabbit.’

He opened his eyes. The old woman, the cottage, and the little girl had vanished; and Sylvia, the Guardian Fairy of the Woods and Forests, stood before him.

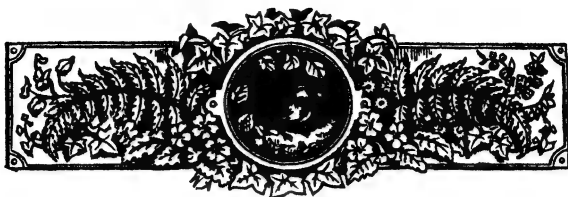
‘Thou art my most faithful and best of subjects,’ she said. ‘No cruel death shall be thine, but one of us shalt thou become,—a guardian Fairy to all those who dwell in sylvan scenes. Unseen shalt thou wander through thy favourite haunts, ministering to the wants and cares of others, as thou hast always done.’

And so into the grey cloudland of Fancy vanish the Fairy Sylvia and the good old Rabbit.

THE BAG OF TROUBLES

AND

THE BAG OF JOYS.



*THE BAG OF TROUBLES AND THE
BAG OF JOYS.*

NOW, if only we had Fairies' eyes, I will tell you what we should see every day and every hour of our lives. We should see dozens and dozens of little bags running races in the sky! Whenever a little baby that the Fairies mean to notice is born, two little bags, one filled with joys, the other filled with sorrows, set out on a race; and the bag that runs the fastest jumps upon the baby's back, and remains there for life.

It happened once upon a time that two children were born at the same hour, and in the same village; and as they were both chil-

dren that the Fairies meant to notice, four little bags immediately set out on a race. In one case trouble won the day, in the other joy. Poor little Ulric, the blacksmith's son, was saddled with the bag of troubles; while Felicia, the infant daughter of the market gardener, was the happy possessor of the bag of joys.

'Whatever ails the boy?' the blacksmith's wife would say. 'He's that cross, I'm most out of my mind with him; and poor little fellow, I can't blame he nowadays, for he's always got some trouble or other; either it's his eye, or his nose, or his back that hurts him.'

'Ay, he do look puny,' Felicia's mother would answer pityingly. 'Very unlike my babe, who's fit to jump out of my very arms for joy like, and is always a-crowing and a-chirruping like six little birds rolled into one; and as for an ache or a pain, I don't believe she'll feel it when it comes.'

Time went on, and Ulric and Felicia grew from long clothes into short clothes, from

babyhood into childhood. Their homes were side by side, so that they saw each other perpetually; for Ulric spent more than half the day in Felicia's cottage, her mother being a kindly-natured woman, who pitied the hard-worked blacksmith's wife, and was glad to relieve her of the extra burden of the peevish sickly child. And with Felicia to act as his patient consoler and unselfish playmate, Ulric would sometimes almost forget his troubles, and even occasionally catch a very faint reflection of his companion's joyousness.

As Felicia grew up, the fame of her beauty and goodness spread far and near. People would come, ostensibly to buy roses at her father's garden, but really to get a glimpse of the lovely girl, whose sweet face, and soft, joyous laugh, were worth going any distance to see and hear. Near her always, by her side or at her feet, was poor, sickly, cross-grained Ulric, his large dark eyes eagerly devouring a book, or levelled angrily at those who presumed to bestow looks

of admiration on Felicia. There was one thing only which had never been much trouble to Ulric, and that was learning. In this he far outstripped Felicia. True, he had much more time to give to his books, for he could not run about as she did the whole day long, as busy as a bee and as merry as a bird. Every one hoped that, as he grew older, Ulric would by degrees shake off his troubles, but it was not so; they seemed to increase with each year. His health grew weaker, his parents died, and he was left alone with very little money, and still less power of gaining more. He was not, however, forsaken in his misery. Felicia's parents were as kind as ever, and the love and devotion lavished on him by the beautiful girl ought to have gone far to console the most miserable man alive. There were many who thought so, and one especially who would have willingly changed conditions with Ulric, could he by so doing have gained Felicia's love. This was Sigbert, the carpenter's son, a strong, sturdy fellow, who as yet had not

known a single ache or pain physically. It is true that he bore a bag of troubles on his back, but he also bore a bag of joys; for the race between the two is sometimes an even one; and when this is the case, both fasten on to the newborn baby. And if strong enough to bear the weight of both bags, perhaps those who have them lead the happiest lives, after all. It is not every one who can support the weight of unmixed happiness without becoming selfish, unable to sympathize with others, and often discontented without knowing why, but in reality because they have nothing to wish for. This had not been the case with Felicia; but then from infancy she had made Ulric's sorrows her own, by the ready sympathy which she gave him on all occasions. Besides, hers was one of those natures which are not easy to spoil. On the other hand, it is not always that unmixed troubles sour and spoil a character, as had been the case with Ulric. To return, however, to Sigbert, whose bag of troubles seemed uppermost just now; for was he

not desperately in love with Felicia, who had not a thought or look for any one but cross-grained Ulric? True, she was sweet and gentle-mannered to him, as was her nature to all; and had he been in any other trouble, her ready help and sympathy would have been at his service; but in this case—ah! that was another matter.

‘And if only he really cared for her, I wouldn’t mind so much,’ poor Sigbert would say to himself, ‘but he doesn’t really: he can’t get on without her, because she is so necessary to him; but he thinks more of a trumpery pain in his own little finger, than he would of any trouble that might attack her. Ugh! the cross-grained—ah well! it’s little use calling hard names, and would only vex *her* if she heard me; so here goes.’ And taking up his tools, he would fall to work, to drive away unpleasant thoughts.

In spite of Felicia’s devotion to him, Ulric was never satisfied: there was always something which he thought she *might* have done and had neglected; but however ~~cross~~ he might be, her

sweetness and patience never failed, though every day she felt more and more sad, and the desire to help him grew stronger and stronger.

One night she lay down in bed with her heart very sore for her old friend. The whole day long she had tried in every way to help and console him; but Ulric's troubles of mind and body had been overwhelming, and her words of love and kindly counsel, and her efforts to relieve his pain, had been totally unavailing. Felicia's joyous nature felt utterly crushed. Tears, rare visitants to her blue eyes—for they were Forget-me-nots that bloomed without water—now rose unchecked, and relieved her aching heart. One wish was uppermost in her mind, and rose perpetually to her lips. 'Oh that I could help him!' Still murmuring these words, she fell asleep, and was borne by Fairy hands into dreamland. At first all was confusion: her mother, father, Ulric, and Sigbert, seemed to pass before her, changing characters; then they disappeared, and the tears that she had shed were

standing before her, changed into little transparent creatures of the purest crystal. They began to sing, and their song was as follows :

‘ Ah ! strange to those eyes of tender blue,
Will be the tears that flow ;
Still, like violets steeped in morning dew,
They will but sweeter grow.

‘ Thou wilt bear thy griefs for others’ sakes ;
The tears that dim thine eyes
Will make them like pure heavenly lakes,
Reflecting back the skies.’

The tears vanished, and, with their song still ringing in her ears, Felicia wandered on in her dream till she came to a beautiful garden, and in some mysterious manner felt that she was in Fairyland ; for the flowers, though bearing the same forms and hues of those in her own garden, were in reality very different. So were the trees ; so were the insects ; and so was the whole atmosphere. She sank down to rest under a fragrant lilac bush ; and as the blossoms waved in the breeze, she could hear the words, ‘ Thou art loved by the Fairies,’ repeated several times.

‘Will they help me?’ murmured Felicia, but there was no answer. She repeated the words, and then the Lilacs called out, ‘Let the bells ring to call the guardian Fairy of this mortal.’ And now strains of the sweetest melody filled Felicia’s ears with wonder and delight.

Looking round, she saw that the musical chimes came from the fragile blue and white Harebells, the pure Lilies of the Valley, the crimson Fuchsias, the purple Campanulas, and the pink Foxgloves, all of which were ringing their bells merrily.

The summons was soon answered : ‘Look up, look up,’ breathed the Lilacs. Felicia obeyed, and saw her guardian Fairy coming towards her, borne by four beautiful Butterflies. Astonishment is never felt in dreams, and there was no surprise in Felicia’s mind at all that was taking place. The Fairy stood before her, kind and gracious ; and the girl, falling on her knees, called out :

‘Oh, dear Fairy, you know what I would ask.

Show me how I can help Ulric, at any cost to myself.'

'There is but one way,' answered the Fairy. 'He is afflicted with a bag of troubles, while you bear a bag of joys. Are you prepared to exchange with him, to give him your joys and take his sorrows, to lose your thousand and one pleasures, your glorious health and bright energy, and be sickly, weak, and heir to a thousand and one ills, as he is?'

'Can this be done?' cried Felicia, overjoyed at the thought. 'Can I help him in this easy way, merely by taking his troubles upon myself?'

'Yes,' said the Fairy almost sorrowfully. 'If you will, this can happen; but weigh well the consequences to yourself. In my opinion, Ulric is not worthy of the sacrifice. But you love him, and so'—

'Yes, dear Fairy; I love him, and therefore no bag of troubles, however heavy, could crush me, if only I can see him happy. Let me do it, let me do it!'

The Fairy bent down, and breathed a kiss on her forehead, and Felicia became unconscious. Then appeared numerous little Sprites, who unfastened the bag of joys from her shoulders.

‘Take it to Mortal Land,’ said the Fairy, ‘and exchange it with that borne by Ulric.’

Immediately a rainbow bridge spanned the gulf between the two countries, and away floated the Sprites with their burden, returning in a trice with one that seemed far larger and heavier. Sorrowfully the Fairy fixed it to the bright form before her; the Lilacs shook their heart-shaped leaves, whispering a mournful farewell; and Felicia was carried by the Sprites across the rainbow bridge out of Fairyland, and waking from dreamland, found herself in her own little bed.

‘Ah! it was only a dream, then, after all,’ she said to herself. ‘Oh! if only it might come true, how happy I should be!’

Just then her mother’s voice sounded from below :

‘Felicia, Felicia ; get up, child ! how late you are this morning !’

‘Yes, mother ; I’ll get up at once.’

But the words were followed by a sharp sudden cry, which went like a knife through the mother’s heart, and caused her to run up-stairs quickly. She found Felicia lying on the bed, her face pale, and drawn with the agony she was suffering.

‘Oh ! dear mother, I am so sorry I startled you ; but such a dreadful pain seized me directly I tried to move, that I couldn’t help calling out.’

‘You must have caught cold, child, or over-tired yourself yesterday with that poor creature Ulric. Here, lean on me, and let me help you to dress.’

Wearily and painfully Felicia contrived to dress herself, and with the utmost difficulty, though helped by her mother, managed to drag herself down-stairs. How different from the beautiful, buoyant girl, whose morning duet with the Lark was usually the first sound that fell on her

parents' ears, and roused them from slumber! Well might her mother exclaim, 'Why, my child, what can have come to you? The Fairies must have changed you in the night.'

Then the remembrance of her dream, which for the moment the strange new sensation had dispelled, returned in all its vividness to Felicia, causing her heart to leap with joy, and for a while she could feel no pain.

'Oh, mother! call Ulric; I must see him!' she entreated.

At that same moment his voice was heard outside in the garden, calling, in unusually brisk, joyous tones, 'Felicia, Felicia, come here quickly! I want you; I have something to tell you.'

She crept to the window, and looked out. Could that be Ulric who was standing there, straight, handsome, and—yes—and actually smiling? Then her supposed dream had been reality after all; it was all true! She had taken his burden upon herself; her fondest hopes were fulfilled, and Ulric was no longer ill and miser-

able. Oh! how happy Felicia felt at that moment! How she welcomed her own sufferings! how less than nothing they seemed to her! Her heart was far too full for words, and she could only nod and smile at Ulric, who, impatient and slightly angry at her silence, called out, 'Well, are you going to stay there all day like a picture? Come out—do, and hear my wonderful news. Well, I did think'—

He was interrupted by an exclamation from Felicia's mother: 'Lack-a-daisy!' she cried in the utmost astonishment, catching sight of him. 'Is everything bewitched to-day?'

He laughed. 'I think I must be, mother; for I feel a different person: no pains, and as light-hearted as a cricket. And I think Felicia must be also, or surely she would be the first to rejoice with me; instead of which, she stops in-doors, and hasn't a word to throw at me.'

Then Felicia cried, 'Oh, Ulric, you must come to me, for I think we have changed places ;

and I am so glad! Come here, and let me try and tell you how glad I am.'

But when he came she could only put her head on his shoulder, and murmur broken words of love and joy. Of course he was very much shocked at the change which one night had wrought in the bright, beautiful girl, and equally astonished; for Felicia did not mention her dream. He told her how he had suddenly awoke in the night, and felt that a wonderful change had come over him. An intolerable weight seemed to have been taken away as by magic. And now he felt as strong as a lion, and able and willing to roam over the whole world.

'But first I must make some money, and then we will go away together—you and I, Felicia,—away from this scene of my old troubles. Shall we?'

'We will talk of that another day,' she replied. 'Just now, you see'—

'Oh! you will soon be strong and well again: you've never known any pain before, you see;

and so it frightens you. Ah! if you had suffered as I have: but that's all over now, I hope, and I mean to enjoy myself. So, make haste, and get well, Felicia. I can't do without you, you know. I want you for a hundred things all day long. But now I must be off to look about me a little, and see how I can begin to make some money; besides, it is too lovely a day to waste in-doors. Good-bye; I shall be back to dinner.' And he was gone.

Well, well, well, what did anything matter, so long as his troubles had left him? He could not know that she had voluntarily taken them upon herself, and he never should know it. Of course, it was only natural he should be *rather* full of himself, his own feelings and doings, just at first. He was very sorry she was suffering; and when he saw that she did not get better, of course he would give her the same loving sympathy and help she had always given him. Ah, no! Felicia, do not cheat your heart thus; he will not use his joys as

you did yours: they will only make him more selfish, for his nature is not golden, like yours.

And so it proved. Each day Felicia's sufferings increased, and one by one all her former pleasures and pursuits were given up. She was, however, patience itself, and those who lived with her never heard a murmur of regret. Happy, of course, she could not be while Ulric remained so changed. He was still fond of her; habit and old companionship could not be so suddenly thrown aside, but it was now a careless affection. He came to see her when it suited him, and when he could spare the time from his manifold occupations; for he had become a busy and prosperous man, his learning had stood him in good part, and he was secretary and reader to a rich blind man in the neighbourhood. And Sigbert? If Ulric came seldom to the gardener's house, Sigbert came often; on the other hand, if Ulric's words were few, Sigbert's were still fewer. But looks are often more than words; and if Sigbert made

prisons of his eyes, keeping his love and sorrow there as captives, it was because he feared to offend Felicia, and knew that only thus might he enjoy the pleasure of seeing her at all. And helpless, pale, and suffering, as she now was, she was infinitely dearer to his heart than ever. At length the Fairies began to pity his sufferings, and resolved to come to his relief. One day, when he and Ulric were both sitting with Felicia and her mother, Ulric suddenly exclaimed, 'I had such a curious dream last night, Felicia! I thought a Fairy came to me, and said, "Will you help Felicia? In the land of treasures there lives a hen who lays golden eggs. Procure one of these, and give it to her; it will make her very happy." It was an odd dream, wasn't it?'

'Yes,' said the girl faintly. 'You believe in the Fairies, Ulric?'

'Most certainly, but not in all my dreams about them. Well, I am going away for a month; and if the hen comes in my way, you

shall have an egg, Felicia. Good-bye. May I pick a rose as I go through the garden?’

And he was gone. But the account of his dream had sunk into Sigbert's mind; and as he sat there grave and silent, a resolution arose within him, and gathered strength every moment. Yes, *he* believed implicitly in the Fairies; and as Ulric scorned the dream, he (Sigbert) would seek the land of treasures and find a golden egg. As he wished Felicia good-bye, he said, ‘If you do not see me for some time, you will know I have gone away.’ She made some indifferent reply, for her thoughts were busy with Ulric, and poor Sigbert went away with a heart of lead.

Next day he started on his travels. He had heard that the land of treasures lay in the far east, but he knew no more; and if the Fairies had not helped him, he would never have found it. One night, however, as he lay asleep, he was gently raised by invisible hands, and on awaking, found himself within the portals of a new country. ‘Is there a king here,

I wonder ?' he said, half aloud ; and his question was answered, apparently by the air itself.

'No ; here the Fairies reign.'

Then Sigbert rejoiced, for he knew that he had arrived at the land he sought.

'Come with me,' continued the voice, 'and I will show you some of the treasures we keep here for poor unfortunate mortals.'

Sigbert followed his invisible guide ; he did not walk, but floated gently through the air. Presently the voice said, 'Rest here !' and he sank gradually to the ground.

Pure white doves were flying to and fro, cooing softly ; snowdrops, daisies, lilies, white lilacs and white roses bloomed in profusion.

'Here are some of our treasures,' said the voice. 'Faith, purity, meekness, and gentleness reign here ; to those mortals who are wise enough to strive for and to value such treasures, we are permitted to carry them. Of these, however, your Felicia has already her share ; the treasure she needs we must seek elsewhere.'

‘Would that she were my Felicia!’ murmured Sigbert.

The voice made no reply, but a dove fluttered down and nestled near his heart, cooing ‘Patience,’ and he thought he heard the pure white flowers telling him to hope and trust. His invisible guide then led him to another part of the kingdom, the domain of Charity, a tender-eyed Fairy, who was too busy to notice him, except by a kind nod; for she was listening to the woes of Mortal Land, and innumerable Sprites were awaiting her orders. Sigbert noticed also that several flowers with crushed petals and bruised leaves were waiting in the outer court, and he wondered at the sight. Answering his thought, the voice said, ‘Even in Fairyland you see there is temporary pain and sorrow. These poor flowers bring their woes to Charity, who never refuses her healing touch and look. She is the best beloved of all the Fairies, for in her every virtue finds a home.’

‘We mortals also love her,’ said Sigbert,

‘although there are but few of our hearts in which she can dwell.’

‘More than you think for, perhaps,’ said the voice; ‘at least so Charity tells us. And now we are coming to a treasure more prized than any other by you mortals; and, alas! the most abused—that of love. There is not one of you who has not felt it in some shape or other, though many unconsciously can only feel it for their own selves.’

Sigbert floated on; a softer, warmer glow now pervaded the atmosphere, a rosy hue rested on the flowers, and on the brilliant birds and butterflies that were flying to and fro. Deep crimson roses, myrtles and carnations, passion flowers, and a hundred other flowers of the affections, filled the air with their sweet perfume. The birds had but one song for Sigbert. ‘Felicia! Felicia!’ they seemed to sing; and the same dear name was breathed by the flowers as he bent over them. He rested under a crimson rose tree, and his thoughts flew back

to her, as they did at every moment. A little Sprite, leaning out from one of the roses, whispered in his ear, 'Do you love Felicia truly?'

'Yes,' was the answer.

'Would you grant her her dearest wish?'

'If I could.'

'Even if it were that of Ulric's heart?'

Sigbert was silent.

'Ah!' sighed the Sprite, 'yours is only mortal's love after all.'

'How can we wish harm to those we love?' cried Sigbert passionately. 'Is his heart worthy of hers? Would his love make her happy?'

'Yes, if his heart could be changed, and so made worthy of hers,' answered the Sprite. 'You came here to find an invaluable treasure for Felicia. May not this be the one?'

'I thought it had been strength and health,' said Sigbert.

'And which would she value most?' asked the Sprite mercilessly. 'You are silent, but you know too well.'

Sigbert groaned. Yes, it was true he did indeed know too well the choice Felicia would make.

‘Is it really her happiness you seek, or is it your own?’ went on the Sprite; and then it crept back again into the heart of the red rose, leaving Sigbert a prey to his own miserable feelings.

‘Oh, Felicia!’ he groaned; ‘and was it for this end I came hither? *Can* I do this even for your sake?’

‘Yes, yes,’ whispered the starry Jessamine, ‘you can, for your love is true. Courage! The purest happiness lies in self-sacrifice.’

‘And who will show me how the task is to be accomplished?’ asked Sigbert.

A chorus of sweet voices answered, ‘We will; follow us.’ And once more Sigbert floated through the air. And as he was wafted along he fell asleep, and thought he saw Felicia in her garden of roses, her cheeks fresh and bright as of old, and a happy light in her eyes. She stretched out her hands to him, say-

ing, 'I owe it all to you; it is your love that has given me this happiness.' And then Sigbert awoke with the halo of the vision still upon him, and with a heart strong enough for any fate. He worked hard for Ulric, culling this quality from one flower, and that from another, sending them across the rainbow bridge by little invisible Sprites, who poured them in the shape of a fluid into Ulric's ear as he lay asleep.

And for a little while his heart did seem changed; he was surprised himself at his generous impulses, and wondered why, every now and then, he took so much trouble for other people; and nothing surprised him more than to feel the old tenderness for Felicia reviving, and the wish to see her and be with her growing stronger every day. This changed aspect of affairs did not last long, however; selfishness and bad habits fought against the new feelings, and nearly drove them away. Perhaps, too, Felicia was partly to blame, for she was certainly changed. Could it be that the Fairies

were playing pranks with her heart and secretly aiding Sigbert, for a change there was most decidedly? It seemed of no account to her now whether Ulric came or stayed away. Her feelings for him were no longer the same. At first she had scarcely noticed Sigbert's absence; but now, she knew not why, she was always wondering when he would return, and the wish to see him grew more and more intense.

All this the Fairies knew, but they did not tell Sigbert; and the brave honest fellow still went on working and bearing, telling his heart it was to secure happiness to Felicia, and was therefore a task that must be performed. At length came the day of his release; he took a kind farewell of the Sprites and Fairies, and was carried in his sleep across the rainbow bridge back to Mortal Land. On waking, he found in his hand a golden egg, on which was written, 'For Felicia.'

'I must see her, then, to give her this,' he thought with a sigh; and summoning all his

courage to greet her as the betrothed of Ulric, he bent his steps towards her home. On his way he met a fellow-villager, who told him that Ulric had married somebody else, and had left the place. Now more than ever did he dread the meeting with Felicia; and with a feeling of anger against the Fairies that his work should have been of so little avail, he put off his visit till twilight. He thought it would then be too dark to see the misery in Felicia's face; but instead of misery, it was joy that he missed seeing,—the glad light of joy in her eyes at his return. Still, if he could not see it in her face, he could hear it in her voice, and the sudden happiness that rushed into his heart almost deprived him of speech.

At last he stammered out, 'Here is a golden egg for you, Felicia; see, it has your name upon it;' and then turned away and left the cottage, for he felt that only beneath the open sky could he breathe freely. Half the night long he wandered about the meadows, treading tenderly on

the daisies wrapped in dewy sleep, or resting in the sweet-scented clover, too happy to think, listening entranced to the wonderful music that seemed suddenly to have entered his soul. The fullest joy was to come. Next day, after seeking Felicia in vain in the cottage, he at last found her in the garden standing in a bower of roses, her face bright and happy, as he had seen it in his dream. And as then, so now, she held out her hands to him, with the words, 'I owe it all to you; it is your love that has given me this happiness!'

.
In due course of time Sigbert learnt that the egg had contained health and strength. He never saw the Fairies again, but they always watched over him and his wife, and one by one the troubles in Felicia's bag were turned by her sweet disposition and true heart into joys. Farewell to her and Sigbert.

UNLIMITED CHEESE.



UNLIMITED CHEESE.

NOW it has come into my head to tell you a story about a very strong man, who was not only very glad of his strength, but so vain of it, that he sent out a notice to the effect that, if a stronger than he could be found, he would at once become his or her servant, and give up all his possessions into the keeping of this other.

A great many accepted the challenge—among the number, several who must have known they could have no chance; but then the reward offered was great, and conceit is a common failing. In each way, however, in which they tried

their strength, they were speedily conquered, and went away crestfallen. One day the strong man was told that a Lion had come to try his chance; and as he lived on the borders of Fairyland, the announcement did not astonish him.

‘Very well,’ was all he said, ‘let the Lion come, and the Lioness as well, if she has any wish to see her husband conquered.’

‘No,’ said the Lion on hearing the message, ‘my wife is too much engaged at home, packing up her goods and chattels, for to-night we shall be in possession here instead of your present master,’—a speech which made the servants very angry, but of course they were much too frightened of the Lion to resent it. However, the boast was an empty one, for the test was by wrestling, and the Lion was very soon overcome.

Then came a Bear, a Wolf, a Hyena, a Gorilla, and, in short, all the principal animals, but only to share the same fate. At last, one day a little Mouse arrived at the gate, and

squeaked out that she too was anxious to try her luck with the strong man.

‘Come, this request is too ridiculous,’ said all who heard it; but as the man had never made any rule as to the size of his opponents, he could not in common fairness refuse to listen to it. So the Mouse was ushered into his presence, and, sitting up on her hind legs, looked composedly into his face. The strong man burst out laughing. ‘Come now,’ he said to the little animal, ‘think better of this; trot home again, little Mouse, to your wee ones, and forget the foolish conceit that has led you hither. Why now, in what possible way can your strength equal mine?’ And again he laughed contemptuously, and all those around echoed the laugh.

‘Let those laugh who win,’ squeaked the Mouse.

‘Certainly,’ said the man, bowing with mock politeness; ‘will you be kind enough to say how our strength is to be tested? If you are deter-

mined to wrestle, my little finger is very much at your service.'

'Not so,' said the Mouse, 'I wouldn't fatigue your little finger for the world. It is your teeth that I propose to trouble.'

'My teeth! Well and good, they are at your service, most formidable adversary; but if you are thinking of gobbling me up, I must warn you that I am very tough and indigestible, whereas now I should imagine *you* would be deliciously soft and tender.' Again he laughed, and all those around echoed the laugh.

'Don't be alarmed,' squeaked the Mouse, unruffled, 'you look a great deal too nasty to eat, not half so good even as mouldy cheese-parings. I am not tempted by your appearance, I assure you; neither am I hungry. May I give any orders I please?'

'Oh, certainly,' said her opponent, again bowing; and he called out in a loud voice, 'Attend to the orders of her Majesty Mrs. Mouse.'

Taking the cue from their master, the servants surrounded the Mouse, and a great deal of mock ceremony went on.

‘Bring me two long thick pieces of rope,’ said the Mouse. The order was obeyed, and she then desired one of the servants to tie fifty knots on each piece, leaving about the space of an inch between each knot. When this was done, she took the end of one rope in her mouth, and dragged it to the feet of the strong man. ‘These knots,’ she said, ‘shall be the test of our strength. If you can bite through them all before I have bitten through all those on the other piece of rope, then I shall have been a presumptuous Mouse, and the largest cat on your premises is welcome to gobble me up.’

The strong man laughed, and, taking up the piece of rope, desired one of the servants to place an arm-chair by his side for the ambitious Mouse, who leaped into it, and sitting up on her hind legs, was soon busily nibbling at the

first knot in company with her opponent. The strong man had bitten through three, before the Mouse was half through her first knot.

‘What a ridiculously unequal contest!’ cried the bystanders.

‘You are witnesses that it was not of my seeking,’ said the man, leaving off biting for a moment; ‘now for the fourth knot. And he placed it between his teeth, one of which, however, broke short off with a great crash.

‘There’s one bone the less,’ he said carelessly, throwing the broken tooth aside; ‘evidently cord is tough eating!’ Undaunted by the misfortune, he continued biting through his knots as fast as he could, when suddenly another large tooth broke off, and then another, and another, till he had but six left, and over twenty knots still remaining to bite through. He looked at the cord belonging to the Mouse, who was steadily and patiently gnawing away at her knots, and had done away with fifteen. ‘There is plenty of time; I can soon catch you up,’ said

the strong man, 'so I will rest awhile. My teeth are too good for this sort of work.'

The truth was, that he was getting dreadfully frightened, and had a very uncomfortable aching in his remaining teeth. The servants now began to lose their self-confident look, and many of them edged away from their master's chair, and drew nearer to the Mouse, who still went on nibbling, apparently taking no notice of what was passing round her. Her opponent rested as long as he could ; but on knot after knot disappearing on the Mouse's cord, he saw it was time to begin again. In pain and misery he tried to gnaw through the next knot ; but after breaking three of his remaining teeth in a vain endeavour to succeed, he paused in despair, and, casting a look at the Mouse, saw to his dismay that she was busily gnawing through her last knot. He looked round, but not one sympathizing look met his glance ; all his servants had now forsaken him, and were gathered round his successor. The strong man groaned aloud. He was beaten,

and there was nothing for it but to acknowledge his defeat. Loud cries arose of 'Long live Mrs. Mouse! she has beaten the strong man; we are now her followers; long live Mrs. Mouse!'

'Long live Mrs. Mouse!' lisped her defeated opponent as bravely as he could—he had lost all his teeth but one, and could not therefore speak plainly—'for once Rats and Mice consort together,' he added bitterly, looking at his followers and servants who had deserted him. 'However, I do not complain, for I acknowledge myself to be beaten.'

'And that is all that I desire,' squeaked the Mouse; 'keep your riches and servants—they would be no good to me and mine; but you must only keep them on two conditions. One is, that Cats are for ever banished from your house; the other, that as long as you live, and during the lifetime of all those who come after you, a rich cheese is always kept in a particular room in your house for the benefit of myself and family. Do you agree?'

‘Willingly and thankfully,’ mumbled the strong man with his toothless gums; ‘even if you eat me out of house and home, no harm shall come to you and yours.’

‘That we are not likely to do,’ said the Mouse. ‘Our race is neither greedy nor covetous; and now I hope I have taught you two lessons. 1. Try and make yourself liked for something better than your strength and riches; then you will not be deserted in time of need; 2. Never despise your adversary.’

And with these sage words, the Mouse scampered off to join her anxious family in some safe, unknown retreat, where, as you can imagine, she was welcomed with the greatest delight. And many were the squeaky ‘Hip, hip, hurrahs!’ uttered by every youthful Mouse on hearing of the glorious prospect of

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